J. J. HART ON THE MAP

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J. J. Hart

Jack Hart's Point near the mouth of Hart Creek on Vancouver Island was named for John Jacob "Jack" Hart. Although Jack Hart's Point was renamed Union Point, Hart Creek can still be found on the map in the area south of Comox just above Union Bay, flowing out into the waters of Baynes Sound.

Who was this Jack Hart? Where did he come from? When did he live here? What did he do? Historical detective work has turned up information that traces his early trail.

Running away to sea, generally associated with the popular 19th century genre of literature, conjures up images that reach all the way back to the Odyssey. This fascinating theme of adventure, change, freedom and distant worlds is timeless. The voyager in literature, and in life, encounters a myriad of ordeals during the journey, and yet requires courage and endurance to survive beyond his youth. Failure and imperfection are invariably part of the human condition and the voyager is not always a hero. And thus, we come to relate the colourful escapades and misadventures of Jack Hart, one of the early Jewish coastal traders in the Pacific Northwest.

John Jacob Hart was born in England on December 25th, 1833. He was less than twenty years old when he began an ocean voyage that would take him almost half way around the world. The young adventurer started out from London on a ship bound for distant Nicaragua, one of the republics of Central America. There he was reputed to have been a filibuster with General William Walker's forces. They were, however, defeated in their conflict and Walker was taken into custody. Hart managed to escape and make his way to San Francisco, California. Shortly thereafter, he was lured by better prospects in the Pacific Northwest.

When the San Francisco assay office made public the results of the Fraser River gold dust tests, Jack Hart sailed north from San Francisco on the Malay in June of 1858. The discovery triggered the first major gold rush in what is now British Columbia. Gold-seekers, miners and adventurers were boarding every available steamer and sailing vessel navigating its way northward up the coast. Speculators followed in their wake.

Hordes of people were arriving in Ft. Victoria at the tip of Vancouver Island, where they could get their supplies and gold licenses before making their way to the mainland. But of course, all this activity was occurring in British territory and the majority of the newcomers were
American. Before long, a biased American press competed with sensational news of gold rushes in nearby Washington Territory, intending to distract them to areas south of the 49th parallel. People flocked into Port Townsend, the port of entry for Puget Sound, and to Semiahmoo, but the most popular destination, in spite of the mud-banks, was Whatcom.29 On the 13th or 14th of June, Jack Hart disembarked from the Malay at Whatcom with a number of ship-mates, in particular Moses Phillips and David Green. However, they found that the speculators and developers were amply positioned there.

Hart and his travelling companions heard that there were fortunes to be made in real estate speculation in nearby Victoria. Rumour had it that town lots could be purchased for as little as $50. A group of eager young men contributed to a “penny purse” [English betting jargon, meaning each person contributed an equal amount of money to make some investments in Victoria. David Green, who was empowered to make purchases on their behalf, came to Victoria, stayed a few weeks and returned to Whatcom.

He advised his partners that it would not be prudent to invest in Victoria as real estate prices had escalated. He then returned the money to the disappointed investors. Jack Hart took his portion of the “penny purse,” and anxiously to get established in the new British colony, left Whatcom for Victoria.

But it appears that Green had not been entirely truthful with his partners. Unknown to them, Green had found some opportunities for himself. He had purchased a lot on Government Street adjoining Bayley’s Hotel, and also a 5 acre suburban lot. Subsequently, when it was discovered that Green had secretly purchased property on his own behalf, the men accused him of some skullduggery and a suit was commenced in the Court of Chancery. Apparently, Green had been “in very indifferent circumstances at the time.” It was alleged that he used the group’s funds to his personal advantage, as leverage for some quick turnovers in real estate speculation. A court case was launched in Victoria almost two years later by Moses Phillips, Jack Hart, et al., against defendant David Green.30

Not long after Hart arrived in Victoria, he met some other entrepreneurs with several good ideas and joined them in a partnership. Hart and his new partners, Truett, Goodman, Hay and Little, leased the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) salmon wharf and advertised their intentions to purchase “Hides and Wools” at the “wharf of the Hudson’s Bay Co.” They also advertised that they had some commodities for sale, 60,000 bricks and 100 casks of lime to be shipped up from San Francisco on the Frigate Bird.31 There must have been some problems however, for within a month, Hart had placed a newspaper notice that he was not responsible for debts contracted in his name unless creditors could show a written authority from him.32 Six months later, still not free of his obligations, Hart and his former partners were sued for damages over the sub-lease of the wharf.

HART TO THE FRASER RIVER

Rumours were circulating about fantastic-sized gold nuggets that could be found lying amid the sand bars of the Fraser River on the mainland. Every ship bound for the mouth of the river brought throngs of prospectors. Hart was convinced that this was a golden opportunity for industrious merchants and entrepreneurs, so he joined the itinerant gold-seekers as far as Fort Hope. Strategically situated at the main gateway to the gold fields, Hart was associated there in a number of brief business relationships. For a short time he had a partner in a business known as Hart & Popper, then he was associated with Charles Davis, a Victoria merchant. When their firm, Davis & Hart, was dissolved, Hart was authorized to collect all the debts due to the firm.33 While operating under the company name of Hart & Co., he was in the mercantile business with Moses Sporborg, an established Victoria merchant and importer.34

SPORBORG & CO.

GROCERIES AND PROVISIONS

Dry Goods, Clothing, Boots and Shoes.

Business was brisk, and Sporborg & Co. participated in the frenzy to service the miners. They shipped their goods out of Victoria harbour on the Governor Douglas and the Colonial Mooly. These small steam boats, built on Vancouver Island, transported freight and passengers as far as Fort Hope.35

Above Fort Hope, rough trails were being constructed. Soon pack trains of mules were transporting goods and supplies for the miners. But, as one historian noted: “The high cost of transportation, and the abundance of gold to pay for these goods and services, caused an orgy of price inflation. A pair of boots might cost over fifty dollars. A pound of nails was a bargain at one dollar. Potatoes sold for as much as ninety dollars a hundredweight. Luxuries such as looking-glasses or cook stoves might cost upwards of seven hundred dollars apiece.”36

While Hart was still associated with Sporborg & Co., they brought $1,000 in gold down the Fraser aboard the Governor Douglas.37 This represented profitable trading and bartering with the miners, who may have been short of minted gold coins and greenbacks (American paper currency), but whose valuable gold dust and nuggets were welcomed. Hart’s successful business relationship with Sporborg continued until c.1860.

By the fall of 1861, Hart was embroiled in some spurious business transactions with a man named John Alfred Hughes, and with his old Malay shipmate from San Francisco, Moses Phillips. While Hart had gone up the Fraser River to work as a trader, Phillips had taken a position as a special police constable at Victoria. Phillips’ job lasted for two years, until he was fired for being implicated with Hughes and Hart in the sale of stolen property. The trio of businessmen, Hughes, Phillips and Hart, sold some flannel to Moses Sporborg, and also offered boots and shoes for sale. When information surfaced that the inventory involved had been stolen from the ship wreck of the True Briton, Hart was arrested for selling shoes and boots stolen from the cargo.38 However, when the case was heard in court, Hart was found not guilty, being unaware that the goods were stolen property.39

TO THE STIKINE FOR FURS AND GOLD

In June of 1862, another gold rush had begun up the Stikine River. Jack Hart was once again associated with Moses Phillips and John Hughes. They set sail for the north-west coast on Hughes’ schooner, John Dickson, Phillips, who was a trained skin-dresser and an experienced furrier, would be trading for furs on this journey. Hart brought merchandise with him, goods that he had purchased on credit. It wasn’t long before he was able to pay off his debts in Victoria. He was so successful on the Stikine that he anticipated building a house near the mines—the planned head of steamboat navigation.
Hart wrote this letter from the Stikine River:

**MOUTH STIKINE RIVER, June 29th, 1862.**

**Messrs.**

... I arrived here three days ago, in twenty-three days from Victoria, and found a good many men encamped, fixing up boats and canoes to go up river. Some men returned from the up river to purchase provisions, and report the country good. One man (a Mr. William Carpenter) took out $970 in one week, and reports men making from $4 to 9 ounces per day; but there are not many men at work yet, the water being high. All are in good spirits. The steamer Flying Dutchman has just returned from a trip up the river. She went up about 170 miles, and reports the river shallow — very big bars making out all along the way.

Some of the steamboat men prospected the river where they took in wood, and told me they found the prospect good, but think it will be better when the river falls. I have sent down over two hundred dollars in gold dust to Phillips, De Young & Co., for goods, which I had with me. I traded also some furs from the Indians.

I shall commence to build a house at the head of steamboat navigation which will be in the centre of the mines, so far as known yet.

Yours, J.H. [13]

Victoria’s newspaper, The British Colonist, published Hart’s letter when it arrived a few weeks later. The readers were regularly advised of events in the area of the “Stikine River,” a stream destined eventually to support a large mining population on its banks.” (So enthusiastic were the pundits, that in 1863 it was briefly considered a separate territory to be named Stikine Territory.) The “stream” was, in fact, a major river — the Indian word Stikine means great river — which for hundreds of years hosted the annual Native summer encampments on its banks. [14]

The miners who came up to the Stikine (sic) really had to till for their gold while the sun shone, for in the winter when the river freezes over, it is not navigable. Daylight lingers there for as long as twenty-four hours during the month of June, while in the month of December, the days are barely six hours in length. It appears that Hart also toiled while the sun shone, bartering for furs and gold, but when the darkness descended, he too left the Stikine. In December 1862, six months after he reached his destination on the Stikine, Hart left with a cargo of furs and gold.

Moses Phillips and John Alfred Hughes turned up again on the schooner John Dicken. Their voyage south to Victoria took 24 days. [15] For a number of years, Phillips and Hughes continued their fur trading business. They transported an astonishing range of trade goods on the schooners Shark and Nanaimo Packet along the coast as far north as Alaska — until misadventures and a robbery forced them into bankruptcy. [16] Hart pursued a different tack.

THE EVILS OF ALCOHOL

Before liquor laws were introduced and enforced, it was common for colonial fur traders, even the Hudson’s Bay Company, to trade liquor. Many Natives were involved in the whiskey trade. Schooners plying the Northwest coast often traded liquor for furs. Jack Hart seems to have established a reputation, not as a drinker, but as a seller of alcohol. One historian accused him of selling liquor when he was at Fort Hope: “Hart had been notorious as a whiskey seller, to both Whites and Indians, for several years past; in 1858 in the Fraser River, and in 1862 at Stikine, where the Miners threatened to hang him if he did not desist, in consequence of the danger of allowing the Indians to become intoxicated.” [17]

In 1863, Hart and Moses Phillips were business associates one more time. The two of them were passengers on the schooner Explorer, which cleared Victoria for the Northwest coast. [18] The vessel carried a large cargo of liquor, part of which they planned on trading to the Indians along the coast, bartering one bottle of whiskey for one marten skin. However, this venture was thwarted, for one week later, while at sea, they encountered a storm just off of Hornby Island. The Explorer was driven ashore and wrecked. [19]

Locally, Indians were recovering from the devastation of a smallpox epidemic which wiped out a number of the tribes residing there. Settlers, taking advantage of the tragic events, had the opportunity to preempt the uninhabited lands. Farmers began to send produce raised in the fertile Comox Valley to Victoria and Nanaimo on available ships. Goods that were needed by the settlers and Indian population at Comox needed a merchant trader. Hart set up his business fifty yards from the Indian Reserve. [20]

His place of business was a waterfront shack, constructed of wood with one-inch wooden boards and battens over the jams. From there, he sold staples such as flour and blankets and traded for furs and deerskins. Hart was joined by a partner, the drunkard John Holder, who sold ale by the case and beer by the keg. Together they “shipped liquor and kept a bar at the waterfront shack.” Liquor was readily available to the Native community, compounding their problems. The colonial settlers were also squabbling amongst themselves, often settling their disputes violently. Hart was implicated with Holder in these whiskey dealings and was blamed for corresponding violence: “...the liquor that he dispensed caused numerous fights and several deaths.” [21] Hart and Holder were fined $500 for allowing whiskey from their store to be consumed on the Indian Reserve. [22] However, they continued on in business, being licensed in both Victoria and Comox in 1865.

With more entrepreneurial opportunities beckoning, Hart and Holder began to expand in other directions. By 1867 they were amongst ten partners involved in the Perseverance Coal Mining Company. Their mine claim, the Beaufort Coal Mine, was located on Bradley Creek, a tributary of the Trent River. They built a trail to the mine and purchased a 160-acre lot (at Union Point, once known as Jack Hart’s Point, and Hart Creek, south of Comox on Vancouver Island. [23]

TRADER AT COMOX

Shortly after the shipwreck and the loss of most of their cargo, Jack Hart went to Comox. In 1863, Comox was considered the northernmost frontier of the colony of Vancouver Island.

[The Scribe]
Bay just south of Langley Point) which became known as Jack Hart's Point - near the mouth of Hart Creek. A townsite was planned within this lot and a wharf was built for shipping their freight. But the Perseverance Coal Mining Company's properties, the Perseverance Townsite and Jack Hart's Point, were purchased by coal magnate Robert Dunsmuir. Dunsmuir wanted to take advantage of the excellent shipping point, which he renamed Union Bay, and thus Jack Hart's Point disappeared from the map.

Meanwhile, Holder continued to sell liquor to the Indians and the settlers, which "had resulted in the death of three settlers and caused much distress locally." Finally, a fourth alcohol-related incident directly involved Holder, who "couldn't hold his liquor." He was arrested for killing Henry Harrup, one of the settlers. The case went to trial in Victoria, with the jury reaching a verdict of "Guilty of manslaughter whilst in a state of temporary insanity." Holder was released from jail in Victoria and returned to Comox, where he stayed with Hart.

Hart was in poor condition, depressed and incoherent. That night he went out and "drowned himself in a fit of delirium tremens on the beach in front of Hart's store." They discovered Holder's body on the beach the following morning. In their cabin, Hart found a note on the table which contained garbled references to his nefarious activities. Holder confessed that he had been "continually in Broil and took drink killed Indian at Comox and more." After Holder's suicide in 1886, Hart left his store in Comox and leased it to the Hudson's Bay Company. The HBC built a depot-to-addition to Hart's original store and continued to conduct business with general goods and blankets while trading for fur. Hart had come full circle with the leasing of his own property to the HBC; ten years of his life had passed since his arrival in Victoria, where he failed venture with other partners involved leasing space on the salmon wharf owned by the HBC.

There is very little recorded about Hart after he left Comox, but he turns up again in 1882 as a dealer in furs, guns and Indian curios in Victoria. Over the years, Hart had many business partnerships, dubious dealings and indiscretions. He had been shipwrecked and had endured other reversals of fortune, but these experiences also included opportunities realized.

When the seasoned veteran finally settled down in mainstream Victoria, he had long been familiar with the arts and culture of the Native population in the Pacific Northwest, stretching from the southern part of the province to the Queen Charlotte Islands and on to Alaska. Eventually, he was a successful merchant and the proprietor of The Indian Ranger in Victoria. He specialized in "Alaska and British Columbia Indian Curios." Hart was also an Indian ethnography buff, publishing legends from their mythology in his brochures. His advertisements boasted that he had the "Largest and Finest Assortment of Curios on the Pacific Coast." Jack Hart, the Pacific Northwest Indian trader, was active in this field until his death in 1900.

Jack Hart's Point is also gone, but Hart's Creek still flows on our map of British Columbia.

Sarah H. Tobe ©1999

Thanks to:
Christopher J. F. Hanna for research material and information.
Sources:
(1) Attributed to Homer. Epic poem encompassing years of wandering, notable experiences and hardships.
(2) An irregular military adventurer.
(4) Colman, 23 Oct. 1860.
(5) Colman, 24 July 1866.

Victoria's Curio Dealers

In the late 1800s, Pacific Northwest Indian art and cultural artifacts were featured in large public exhibitions in England, Europe and then in the United States. Indigenous peoples from this region were invited or contracted to travel to many of these international expositions, introducing the world to their own particular culture.

All this ballyhoo stimulated a heated competition for the acquisition of relics from the diminishing tribes between the museums of New York, Chicago, Washington, San Francisco, and elsewhere. Substantial museum research, anthropology, ethnography, archeology, and the gathering of pertinent data, went alongside the race for museum collecting. During this period of heightened activity, foreign museums and private collectors created such a demand that there was a mass exodus of cultural artifacts from the province. Unfortunately, the important collections gleaned during the earlier part of this era were not housed in our Canadian public institutions; they were to reside in England, Germany, Russia, Austria, Norway and the United States. However, these artifacts garnered by the museums were stored in various repositories and conserved for posterity.

Collecting in this region had begun around 1870. As the demand escalated, the quest emanated from Victoria, the main trade centre for Pacific Northwest Indian art. The role of the curio dealers in this scenario was significant. From early on, they had been an important link in the economic system, participants in a barter system that allowed trade to progress between the newcomers to the frontier and the native population. Then, as traders, agents, and liaisons, they emphasized the importance of Native art, both historically and artistically. Subsequently, they managed to promote a local awareness, an appreciation for the uniqueness of indigenous art and culture.

Between the years 1880 and 1914, Victoria had more curio dealers than any city on the Pacific Coast. The majority of these dealers were Jewish: John J. Hart and Jacob Isaac, Frederick Landsberg and Samuel Kirschberg, Alfred and Rose Aaronson.
By the 1880's, when the economy of the province was faltering, the port of Victoria's burgeoning tourist trade emerged as a major economic asset. Cruise ships from San Francisco en route to Alaska often anchored in Victoria's picturesque port while their passengers disembarked. When the C.P.R. completed their transcontinental railway through to Vancouver, they also provided a maritime connection to Victoria. Inevitably, the C.P.R. built a luxurious new hotel near the inner harbour to accommodate the increased tourism. Victoria, as the Northwest Coast hub for collectors, was hospitable, civilized and accessible.

While the curio merchants were gainfully accommodating the souvenir-seeking tourists, private collectors and museums, they also contributed indirectly to the stability of Victoria's economy. Victoria's curio dealers did not appropriate or plunder the items that were included in the various collections, they acquired them through normal commercial transactions which occurred in their trading relationships. Records indicate that the Northwest Coast Indians were experienced traders and did not part with anything cheaply if it was of good quality.

JOHN J. HART AND JACOB ISAACS

John Jacob “Jack” Hart, like so many other immigrants, was an intrepid risk taker. He had sailed half way round the world from London, England, to the nascent British Colony of Vancouver Island, arriving in June of 1858. On the Pacific Northwest frontier, Hart was an adventurer, an opportunist, and an Indian trader. In the northern, more isolated coastal regions, he was familiar with the language and customs of various Native peoples.

His sojourn to the Stikine River, where he bartered merchandise for furs and gold, acquainted him with the Haida and Tsimshian silversmiths and the gold work of their skilled artisans near the Cassiar mines. Later, when Hart finally settled down in Victoria, he developed a penchant for Pacific Northwest Indian ethnography and became a dealer in furs and Indian curios. Accordingly, Hart was listed in the 1882 Victoria directory as a dealer in furs, guns and Indian curios.

Eventually, Hart was associated in Victoria with Jacob Isaacs, who was listed in the 1884 directory as a general dealer in merchandise. Little information has surfaced on Jacob Isaacs, but the store, Isaacs and Company, was located at 36 Johnson Street. By 1886, the business was advertised as J. Isaacs Indian Bazaar. An invoice for items amounting to $90 is still in the archives of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. It was one of the earliest curio dealer invoices to appear in a museum file and was for a shipment of Tsimshian and Nisga’a articles from the Nass and Skeena Rivers.

Isaacs and Hart then moved further up the street to 43 Johnson Street, as they were listed at that address in 1889. J.J. Hart’s name appeared as superintendent in an advertisement for J. Isaacs & Co. “dealers in furs, robes, Indian curios, guns, ammunition, fishing tackle and notions” at the “corner of Johnson and Oriental Streets.”

Eventually, J.J. Hart & Co. owned The Indian Bazaar at 43 Johnson Street. The company name had changed but the address was still the same. Isaacs seems to have left the curio trade, for Hart was listed as the sole proprietor in 1890. Meanwhile, Isaacs was listed as a clothier and was involved in a California auction business from 1890 to 1895.

Hart was selling his curios in a hot market. Aboriginal artifacts such as wooden masks, shaman rattles, totem poles, canoes, baskets and bowls were in demand. He supplied a number of important artifacts for the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. During the fall/winter of 1894, records indicate that Hart sold pieces to the much esteemed North Pacific Coast ethnographer and anthropologist, Franz Boas (a Prussian-born Jew). Hart published a small booklet that same year, directed more towards the tourist population.

THE INDIAN BAZAAR

J. ISAACS & CO.

DEALERS IN
FURS, ROBES,
INDIAN CURIOS.

260
Carr, Johnson and Oriental Streets.

J. J. HART, Sup't.

THE INDIAN BAZAAR

ALASKA AND BRITISH COLUMBIAN INDIAN CURIOS

LARGEST AND FINEST ASSORTMENT OF CURIOS ON THE PACIFIC COAST.

H. J. HART & CO.

The publication, saturated with promotional material relative to The Indian Bazaar, included questionable history and information. Hart equated the Northwest Coast tribes with past civilizations, comparing their speech patterns with the archaic Phoenician language and making analogous references to ancient Egyptian civilizations. However far fetched some of his assertions may have seemed, his collection was splendid. He owned a magnificent forty foot Haida totem pole from Skidegate on the Queen Charlotte Islands—which he remanstrated “should be sent to London, and set up next to Cleopatra’s Needle, so that a specimen of ancient Egyptian and Haida (sic) work can be seen side by side.” His recounting of the Indian creation myth is as fine a rendition as can be found in any of the anthropology books of this century.

J.J. Hart, specialist in “Alaska and British Columbia Indian Curios,” had the “Largest and Finest Assortment of Curios on the Pacific Coast” until his death in 1900. Hart was not recorded as having married. His sister, Esther, married Raphael “Ralph” David Davis, and their progeny continued the family lineage in Victoria for a number of generations. John J. Hart is buried in Victoria’s Jewish cemetery in the Davis/Hart family plot.

Hart’s niece Kate Davis married Maurice Salmon. She was the mother of Josephine (Salmon) Lancaster. The portrait of Hart, and another of him taken with his nieces, Rebecca (Davis) Granat and Kate (Davis) Salmon, is courtesy of Randall Davis.

John Jacob Hart with his nieces, Rebecca (Davis) Granat and Kate (Davis) Salmon.

Courtesy of Randall Davis.
Granat and Kate (Davis) Salmon, were supplied by Randall Davis.

Sarah H. Tobe ©1999

Thanks to:
Christopher J.P. Hanna for historical information and materials.
Sources:
Colored. 36 Sept. 1900, p. 5.

Fredrick Landsberg and Samuel Kirschberg

Frederick (Lebshak) Landsberg, an Orthodox Jew from Berezhiv in the Ukraine, after much hardship, arrived in Victoria in April of 1884. He had escaped anti-semitic pogroms, made his way across the Austro-Hungarian Empire into Germany, and then got passage out of Hamburg on a cattleboat to Quebec. Before long he moved on to Ontario, where he eventually found employment with the C.P.R. working as a labourer on the railway. He saved enough money to buy some merchandise and started peddling to the navvies and lumberjacks along the line. The young entrepreneur managed his money well, purchased a railway ticket and headed west.

Fredrick Landsberg, a successful young businessman when he married Erna Esther Marymont in Seattle, in 1895. They lived in Victoria and had two daughters, Beatrice Hannah and Kathleen. Not long after their second daughter was born, Landsberg went bankrupt, but he paid off his creditors at 50 cents on the dollar.

It is uncertain how Landsberg's partner, Kirschberg, may have been involved. Very little information is available about Kirschberg and his background. He ran the Victoria loan office and curio shop while Landsberg took care of their Vancouver men's clothing store, but he reportedly dropped out of the business in 1894 and was failed as a debtor in 1899.

However, in 1896, Landsberg and Kirschberg must still have been associated. They shipped a collection of curios out of Victoria bound for New York, where they could be sold at much higher prices. The shipment was on board the steam ship when it caught on fire, but fortunately much of what was in Kirschberg's trunk escaped fire damage. From the salvaged collection, Franz Boas (the ethnographer and anthropologist) paid $800 to Landsberg and Kirschberg for 180 items from the central coast and Thompson River areas, which he claimed were "at bargain prices."

Landsberg continued dealing in Indian curios, acquiring The Indian Bazaar after Jack Hart's death in 1900. That same year, he shipped five cases of very old and valuable artifacts from Hart's collection to the University of Pennsylvania Museum. With the transition to new ownership, advertisements for the British Columbia and Alaska Indian Bazaar were notably sub-headed Victoria Loan and Security Co. Ltd., F. Landsberg, Managing Director.

The store at 43 Johnson Street stocked items for sale on the main floor, but Landsberg's own collection (which probably still contained specimens from Hart's collection) was installed on the upper floor of the building. It was displayed as Landsberg's Free Museum and attracted many visitors.

In 1902, when the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George V and Queen Mary) came to Victoria, Landsberg was asked by Mayor Charles Hayward to prepare a special display of artifacts for them and to arrange a meeting with a delegation of Indian leaders.

But Landsberg had shipped pieces "of exceedingly great age and proportionately rare" to the University of Pennsylvania Museum, he admonished that they would have been "a valuable addition to the provincial museum." The foundation of the Provincial Museum of Victoria had occurred in 1888, but there was very little activity as far as establishing an Indian collection until well after 1893. Neither the provincial museum nor any of the Canadian museums were involved in the intense international rivalry to collect Indian artifacts and cultural miscellany from the Pacific Northwest.

Landsberg mounted a publicity campaign to provoke recognition of this oversight. A 1903

Victoria newspaper photograph of "B.C. Indian Curiosities" located in Chicago, displayed the "valuable relics of the now rapidly disappearing Indian tribes." An anonymous (and supposedly fictitious) visitor from New York complained
about the prominent collections of Indian artifacts already housed in American institutions like the Museum of Natural History in New York and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, warning that the rare specimens in the grand collection possessed by Mr. Landsberg were in danger of being acquired by both institutions. Landsberg prodded further, expressing "the great pity that they cannot be retained in the province." It was good publicity and the ruse had merit, for he achieved some concrete results. He was instrumental in encouraging local acceptance of indigenous art.

He earned a reputation with the various museums for selling at fair market value, for when a certain collection was offered, it was noted that "the prices were at least twice those from Landsberg." His knowledge and artistic judgment were also highly regarded. He especially commissioned the two totem poles that were to grace the lobby of the C.P.R.'s luxurious new chateau, Victoria's Empress Hotel.

Landsberg sold pieces valued at $500 to the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago in 1903, and another $200 worth the following year. The museum reluctantly acquired one small purchase from another competitor "whose material was almost invariably inferior." The New York Museum of the American Indian purchased the George Hey collection from Landsberg in 1904 and 1905.

Shortly afterwards, Landsberg decided to go into the real estate business. In partnership with William Davies, he established the Empire Realty Company. The flourishing Victoria real estate market continued on until 1914. During this period of affluence, Landsberg built a large house at 106 Medana Street in James Bay. It is still standing, a designated Victoria heritage building.

When Landsberg closed The Indian Bazaar at 43 Johnson Street in 1908, his remaining stock was purchased by curators for various museums. Some of the exceptional inventory from the "Landsberg Collection," comprised of "Indian Baskets, Curios and Relics," was featured in photographs meant for promotional purposes.

Although Landsberg was involved in his real estate business, he seems not to have left the field entirely for his name was still mentioned in the market for many more years. Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum purchased Haida argillite carvings from the Queen Charlotte Islands from Landsberg as late as 1912.

Other sales to collectors were recorded in the summer of 1914, and then again in January, 1915. Finding older specimens for collectors had become increasingly difficult for him, nonetheless, several major purchases were made by the curator of the Milwaukee Public Museum—which included two copper and a model of Chief Skidegate's house.

**Kudos for Landsberg**

Most of Landsberg's background history, community and personal life is missing from this article on the curio dealers of Victoria. It should be mentioned, however, that during his lifetime, Frederick Landsberg was lauded by the mayor, aldermen and citizens of Victoria for his community efforts, and by numerous organizations for his charitable and unselfish commitments. He was also awarded the Best Citizen Medal by the Victoria Post chapter of the Native Sons and Daughters of British Columbia in 1930, and the Jubilee Medal in 1933. In 1935 he was buried in Victoria's historic Jewish cemetery; his wife, Erna, had pre-deceased him in 1915.

*Sarah H. Tobe ©1999*

**Thanks to:**
Christopher J.P. Hanna for historical information and materials.

**Sources:**
- Giulietti, 12 March 1989, p. 5.

**THE AARONSONS**

Andrew Alfred Aaronson was born in Chelsea, London, England in 1856. At the age of 21, he left England to embark on a long ocean voyage that took him round Cape Horn, bound for Victoria, British Columbia, where he settled in 1877. He started a pawnbroking business which involved collecting old jewellery and Indian curios, on a site that is now 1200 Government Street. By 1882, Aaronson's store was located at 75 and 79 Johnson Street. The enthusiastic young man was involved in community activities. He joined the Tiger Company, one of the popular Victoria City Fire Brigades, which voted him an officer and the Company treasurer.

He returned to England in 1886, where he attended the Colonial and Indian Exhibition. Aaronson, arrayed in a buckskin suit and jauntily sporting a wide sombrero, told the British press that he was in charge of the British Columbia Indian curios at the exposition. He also told them that he was called "Wild Dick," "employed to hunt the recalcitrant Indian to his forest retreat."

The imaginative Aaronson had re-invented himself as a Canadian frontier character. His "Wild Dick" was not unlike the American "Wild Bill" Hickok, who had appeared on stage with "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Cody's Wild West Show toured through Europe, perpetuating the folklore of the buffalo hunter and Indian scout, supposedly battling the Indians on the American western frontier. Hickok, Cody, and Aaronson...
were the traditional long fringed buckskins of the early mountain men and fur trappers. However, back in Victoria, the press was not in the least bit impressed with Aaronson's preposterous claims. The skeptical Colonist scoffed: "Fancy Aaronson hunting Indians!"

Nevertheless, it was a good promotional ploy. Aaronson was aware that the 1886 exposition in England had served to heighten interest in Pacific Northwest Indian art and culture. When a British Columbia troupe of Bella Coola Indian dancers toured Europe, they were described as looking "Chinese or Japanese." Indians were supposed to have "redskins" and "roman noses" like the stereotyped descriptions in American literature. Notwithstanding, the performances were a unique experience and the Europeans learned something of their dances and culture. As to the cognoscenti, collectors were intent on filling their museums with the artifacts of the "rapidly disappearing" tribes, while ethnographers were anxious to pursue new endeavors in the area. Aaronson had every intention of returning to Victoria, where he would become one of the significant Indian curio dealers, supplying unique artifacts to museum collectors. But before returning to Victoria, he got married.

Andrew Alfred and Rose Aaronson were married in 1886. Rose was also from Chelsea. The young couple shared a similar background in that both of their mothers were born in England and both of their fathers were from Holland. Their first child, a daughter named Hannah, was born in London in 1887. The following year the young family left for Victoria. Victoria was poised to become the main trade centre for Pacific Northwest Indian art. Located almost halfway between San Francisco and Alaska, the port would host cruising tourists disembarking to peruse the curio stores looking for souvenirs. Aaronson anticipated this, for The Victoria Indian Curio Bazaar catered to this burgeoning tourist trade. He also acted as an agent for high quality indigenous art. Aaronson made some important sales to James Terry, a private collector associated with the American Museum. In 1898, he sold some notable collections to George Dawson of Montreal (a geologist with the Canadian Geological Survey), which were sent to Ottawa under the direction of the Field Museum, and to C.T. Currely, the director of the Royal Ontario Museum. The Field Museum in Chicago acquired pieces from Aaronson in 1903/04.

In the meantime, Aaronson, a flamboyant community figure often referred to as "Andy" or "uncle," still carried on with his pawnbroking business in Victoria. The Aaronson family had also expanded, with three more children born in Victoria; Albert "Bert" H., born in 1889, followed by Harry in 1891, and then Irene in 1895. Their family home was at 1811 Quadra Street. The popular "Andy" died in January, 1912. His widow, Rose, continued on in the business for six more years.

When the Aaronson collection became available, recommendations were made for its purchase by the Royal Ontario Museum on the grounds that it was doubtful whether a comparable collection could again be obtained since "foreign" collectors had "so completely cleared the British Columbia coast of ethnological specimens." Rose also sold more than 85 carvings to the collector Col. Leigh Morgan Pearall who eventually donated his collection of almost six hundred carvings to the University of Florida.

A wide angle photograph of the day makes visible the extensive collection and inventory of Mrs. Aaronson's Curio Store. A second promotional photograph advertised as follows:
Of interest is a nostalgic recollection about "the interesting Curio Shop operated by Mrs. Aaronson":

In this store one could find the most beautiful baskets. Mrs. Aaronson had a native Indian woman by the name of Maggie who sat in the doorway weaving baskets. Mrs. Knoxles (Rose's daughter Hannah) tells me that Maggie made one basket which took her three months to complete, at $1 per day, and that Mr. Beaton purchased it on completion for $30. "This woman could make baskets to any pattern you desired and this little store received orders from many other cities for Maggie's baskets.

For sixteen years, from 1912 until she succumbed in September, 1918, Rose conducted the souvenir and curio business, first at the premises next to the Columbia Theatre on Government Street, and then later at a store in the Bridgman Block. Born on 27 Feb. 1864 in London, England, she was just 24 when she emigrated to Victoria with her husband. Rose and Andrew Alfred Aaronson are both buried in the Victoria Jewish cemetery.

The Aaronsons were survived by their four children. Their son, Albert "Bert" H., was a long time druggist on Fort Street in Victoria. Their grandson, Gordon, followed in his father's footsteps. His sister, Eleanor (Aaronson) Adams, was 3 years old when grandmother Rose died. As keeper of the family memorabilia, she has graciously supplied photographs. Another generation of Rose and A.A. Aaronson's descendants still resides in Victoria.

Lea Sarah H. Tobe ©1999

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Sources:
Colombo, 30 August 1886, p.8.
VIEW OF MR. F. LANDSBERG'S INDIAN CURIO COLLECTION, VICTORIA, B.C.