

The Shaughnessy Heights Landscape: Symbolizing the Power of the CPR Company in Vancouver, 1887-1914

Designed by Frederick Gage Todd, the Shaughnessy Heights neighborhood is an iconic example of the Garden City model of urban planning, and one of the first holistically designed landscapes in Western Canada. The creation of the Shaughnessy Heights neighborhood exemplified the Canadian Pacific Railway's exercise of power and influence over the early development of the City of Vancouver. The City has listed Shaughnessy Heights as a Heritage Conservation Area, stating that the neighborhood is "valued as a residential area that reflects the central role the Canadian Pacific Railway played in the development of Vancouver" (City of Vancouver [Vancouver] 2015). The strategic planning and construction of this neighborhood, and the concentration of wealth that resulted, served to fulfill one of the CPR executives' important goals for Vancouver: the emergence of a powerful social elite, centered around CPR company executives and allies. Shaughnessy Heights was created at a pivotal time in Vancouver's early history, and the concentration of power and wealth in this landscape had lasting effects on the city's development, some of which are still seen to this day.

In 1871, British Columbia joined Canadian confederation with the promise that the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) would be extended to the West Coast. The CPR's Western terminus was originally meant to be in Port Moody. However, CPR executives visited the small town of Vancouver (known as Granville at the time) and found it to have a more attractive harbour for shipping. So, the railway was extended to end in Vancouver, a move that put this budding city on the map of Canada and attracted new investors and settlers (McDonald 1977). Crews completed the railway construction in 1885, and in 1887 the first locomotive arrived at its terminus in the city of Vancouver (Picken 1887). The railway effort required tens of thousands of workers, including many Chinese temporary labourers who were forced to work in dangerous and inhumane conditions (Omer 2018). Their experience stood in stark contrast with the emerging beneficiaries of the railway's success: CPR executives, employees, and allies, originally from Scotland and England, who immigrated to the West Coast. Seeking wealth and status, these new residents flocked to Vancouver, drawn by the railway's promise of economic prosperity and the potential to break into a new chapter of elite society (McDonald 1990).

As the lands surrounding Vancouver were being distributed, the CPR company benefited greatly in return for connecting Vancouver to Canada's railway network. In 1867, the passing of the Indian Act legislation had "assigned the Federal Government... the responsibility for all 'Indians and lands reserved for Indians'" (Wilson & Henderson 2014). Despite the government's promises to Indigenous groups that their land-based activities could continue, the Tseil-Waututh, Musqueam, and Squamish people were displaced from their ancestral lands in what is now known as Vancouver and moved onto 5,800 acres of reserve lands (MacDonald 1977). Their displacement left unresolved issues of land title and ownership in the region that remain to this day. New immigrants of European descent flowed into the Vancouver region. The entire Burrard Inlet area was considered open for pre-emption, and British settlers could lay claim to 160 acres at a price of \$1 per acre (MacDonald 1977). In theory, the land was earmarked to be used for agricultural purposes, but in reality, there was rampant real-estate speculation, and the choicest lands were bought up (MacDonald 1977). In the midst of this real-estate frenzy, the Government of Canada granted the CPR company 6,000 acres of crown land in the Vancouver region alone (MacDonald 1977), notably more land than was allocated for First Nations reserves. Across Canada, the company was granted a total of 25,000,000 acres of land, to be used for the rail right-of-

way and/or sold as real estate (Picken 1887). The immense scale of this land transfer from the government to a private company was unprecedented, as acknowledged in an 1887 pamphlet about the City of Vancouver:

The grant of such privileges as these, is unusual, but it was necessary to get the work undertaken at a time when the project of building a railway over the difficult and almost unexplored mountain ranges of British Columbia seemed almost impracticable. (Picken 1887)

The CPR land grants gave the company great power over the early development of the City of Vancouver, allowing the company to amass tremendous wealth through real estate sales. But the CPR's power extended beyond its accumulation of wealth, and into social and political spheres. The railway company wanted to keep their power centralized, which they did by controlling Vancouver's social demographics to suit their needs. According to McDonald, The CPR company "exerted... direct influence in creating a high-status elite at the top of Vancouver's social structure by settling leading businessmen and the wealthy on company land" (1990). As the largest holder of real estate in Vancouver, the company influenced which potential landowners were able to settle in the city's prestigious neighborhoods, often based on socioeconomic status (Vancouver 2015). Between the founding of Vancouver and the late 1890s, the CPR's corporate success and its extensive control of lands ensured that "families with CPR connections stood at the centre of economic power and social influence" (McDonald 1990).

In the 1890s and early 1900s, most of Vancouver's powerful citizens resided in the West End neighborhood. However, in the year 1907, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company announced they would be building a new and exclusive residential neighborhood. It would be located on lands adjacent to the railway's Lulu Island Line, an economically important route that carried passengers and freight between Steveston and Vancouver. The significance of the new neighborhood to the CPR was demonstrated by its name: Shaughnessy Heights, after company president Sir Thomas Shaughnessy. The CPR's control and micro-management of every aspect of the development has been well documented. The company "retained iron-clad control over the quality of the development, and reviewed and approved the plans for every house proposed for the area" (Vancouver 2015). In addition to naming the development after the CPR president, the company named many streets after its own high-ranking officials (Mackie 2015).

The construction of Shaughnessy Heights was instrumental in the stratification of Vancouver's social scene and the concentration of wealth in a small area of the city. Designed by landscape architect Frederick Gage Todd with the help of Danish engineer L.E. Davick, this neighbourhood exemplified the Garden City style of urban planning, and represented a growing interest in the process of deliberate planning for new developments in North America (City of Vancouver 2015). The Garden City movement's shunning of 'overcrowded' and 'congested' city blocks in favour of single-family housing often deepened wealth disparities. According to the Garden City movement's founder, Ebenezer Howard, the creation of a Garden City was meant to increase land values for the benefit of landowners in the new development (Encyclopedia Britannica 2012).

In keeping with the CPR's vision of a wealthy and powerful neighborhood, Shaughnessy Heights was designed to reflect European ideals of aristocracy. Historical references were common in the site's built architecture, including Arts & Crafts, Tudor Revival, Craftsman, Georgian and Neoclassical styles

(Vancouver 2015). Many homes were constructed in a Tudor Revival style, with the buildings and their gardens bearing a strong resemblance to old English manors (Kalman & Ward 2012). This was a deliberate move to echo the symbols of wealth and status that British immigrants were accustomed to seeing in their country of origin (Government of Canada 2020). The historical references also symbolized patriotism for residents who immigrated from England and Scotland (Vancouver 2015).

The rules for homeowners also reflected British aristocratic attitudes of the time, in that land ownership was exclusionary based on wealth, social status and race. The CPR declared that only “racially appropriate homeowners” would be considered (Kalman & Ward 2012), and potential buyers at the time were assured of “greater amenities and fewer threats of encroachment by... the lower social orders” (McDonald 1996). Racial segregation was evidenced by the presence of Chinese servants’ quarters on the architectural plans of several houses (Government of Canada 2020). In addition to the overt racism, there were also more subtle barriers to homeownership: to keep the neighborhood beyond reach of average citizens, the CPR set property prices at \$6,000 which was six times the standard of the time, and the Shaughnessy Settlement Act of 1914 allowed only single-family homes to be built in the area (Vancouver 2015).

Although the architecture of homes in Shaughnessy Heights mimicked historical styles, the surrounding landscape was emblematic of the new Garden City movement taking place in urban planning at the time. The City of Vancouver has characterized Shaughnessy Heights as “one of western Canada’s best examples of a planned Garden City community” (2015). The core tenets of the Garden City movement were the creation of green open spaces interspersed within urban areas, and the control of population density, which were intended to prevent the overcrowding and uncontrolled development that observed in Europe since the Industrial Revolution (Encyclopedia Britannica 2012). A Garden City was meant to be owned by a private corporation that could control how the land was used, and in this case the CPR fulfilled that role. The design was orchestrated by landscape architect Frederick Gage Todd, a proponent of the Picturesque style and the Garden City movement (The Cultural Landscape Foundation 2020). Todd had apprenticed with the celebrated Frederick Law Olmsted, with whom he co-designed Mount Royal in Montreal, before founding the first landscape architecture firm in Canada (Pollock-Ellwand 2019). Todd preferred naturalistic landscapes and advocated for open green spaces within cities. A key theme of his designs was the placement of a ‘necklace’ of parks and open spaces that were connected by greenways (Canadian Society of Landscape Architects 2020). As an emerging figure in North American landscape architecture, Todd was an understandable choice to fulfill the CPR’s goal of attracting city elites.

In planning the Shaughnessy Heights landscape, Todd strove to “unsettle all previous ideas of where a fine house should be built”, responding to the natural beauty of Vancouver’s surroundings through his work (McDonald 1996). He conceptualized a modern and paradisaical neighborhood with ample green space and amenities. The curved street pattern, boulevards, and park-like landscaping set Shaughnessy Heights apart from previous developments that had been attempted locally. Even before construction began, the developers had already invested \$2,000,000 in preparations for the site, including sewers, sidewalks, and roads (Vancouver 2015). The new development had large lot sizes and tree-lined boulevards, and featured a golf course and country club (McDonald 1996). At the centre was a large circular road known as ‘The Crescent’, which surrounded a forested park. In keeping with Todd’s preference for picturesque landscapes, the site featured sweeping lawns and lush plantings. Trees were sourced at a mature size to maximize shade and bring gravitas to the landscape (Vancouver 2015).

Private properties followed Todd's lead in their designs, creating open expanses of lawn. They also included formal English gardens, as well as "greenhouses, rose gardens, summer houses, pergolas, coach houses..." (Vancouver 2015). These expansive grounds often required teams of staff for maintenance, further enforcing the homeowners' wealth.

Through Todd's design, the CPR attempted to introduce a distinctive urban style that would characterize Vancouver's new class of high-society members. Initial results were promising - citizens lined up for blocks to try and purchase a piece of land in Shaughnessy (Vancouver 2015). The CPR's strategy had proved successful, and "Shaughnessy Heights quickly challenged the West End as Vancouver's elite neighbourhood, attracting more than twenty percent of Society families in only five years" (McDonald 1990). By 1914, 80% of the households in the neighborhood were featured on the *Social Register*, Vancouver's list of high society members (Vancouver 2015). Many of these residents were closely connected with the CPR company, and they formed a tight-knit social scene. In just a few years, the transformation of this land from forested wilderness to wealthy urban enclave was complete. Shaughnessy Heights would become a lasting testament to the ideals of the CPR company during this period of history. By promoting Shaughnessy Heights and populating it with high-status residents, the CPR company and Todd had set a precedent for urban planning on the West Coast, which had ripple effects across the city of Vancouver and the rest of Canada. Todd went on to design more Garden City developments, including Leaside and Mount Royal, and co-found the Town Planning Institute of Canada. Other cities across North America were also implementing the Garden City model at this time, and many landscape architects began embracing the concept of parks and green space networks within urban limits. Today, urban planners still implement some Garden City-related principles such as greenbelt preservation and density limitation.

The CPR's intentional concentration of wealth and power in Shaughnessy Heights had enduring effects on the City of Vancouver. The neighborhood saw difficult times during the 1930's and the 2nd World War, when residents were forced to sell their homes, and many stood vacant due to unemployment and economic difficulties. In 1942, prominent landowner A.D. McRae sold his Shaughnessy mansion to the Federal Government for just \$1 so it could be used as a hospital for wounded soldiers (Vancouver 2015). However, in recent decades, Shaughnessy Heights has returned to its original status as one of Vancouver's most expensive neighborhoods.

In some ways, the CPR's vision of an exclusive, wealthy neighborhood has endured, but in other ways, the landscape has changed. By 2014, Shaughnessy Heights had claimed the highest average house price of any neighborhood in British Columbia and was Canada's fourth-richest neighborhood (Canadian Business 2014). Since the 1940's, many of the area's historic mansions were maintained, and the original spirit of Todd's landscape has remained relatively preserved. However, over the same period Shaughnessy's population has fortunately become more diverse, with 32% of current residents speaking a Chinese language and others speaking Tagalog, Korean, Spanish, and French, according to a recent City of Vancouver Census. Also counter to the CPR's original wishes, 25% of the neighborhood's dwellings are now rental properties (City of Vancouver 2016). In 2015, the City of Vancouver designated Shaughnessy Heights as an official Heritage Conservation Area and decreed that any new construction must be in the spirit and style of the original development, to preserve the neighborhood's unique aesthetic character. The history of Shaughnessy Heights remains an example of the power and influence of the Canadian Pacific Railway company at a formative period in Vancouver's urban development.

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