

pg 2 / Mar 21, 1999

The Cranmore Court apartments at 2100 Cadboro Bay Rd. in Oak Bay sit on the site of the original Victoria arena that burned down in 1929



IAN MCKAIN

A VICTORIA SECRET

On Christmas Day, 1911, Victoria's first hockey arena opened for business with a live band and an afternoon of public skating.

"You could tell who the Easterners were," noted one reporter. "They were the ones standing up." In a city where natural ice was as rare as a blizzard, the arena was a novelty. It was also an innovation, as the building boasted the first artificial ice surface in Canada.

The rink was called, simply, the Arena, although the public called it the Patrick Arena after the brothers who built it.

Lester and Frank Patrick were the sons of a millionaire lumber baron. They used their father's riches to fulfill their hockey dreams.

The Patricks formed the three-team Pacific Coast Hockey Association in 1911, paying good money to raid the rosters of the top Eastern professional teams.

They had a league, teams, players. They needed a place to play.

The brothers paid a princely \$10,000 for nine vacant lots on the northeast

corner of Epworth and Fort (now Cadboro Bay Road) in Oak Bay. Carpenters earning \$4 a day used 1.2 million feet of lumber for the 3,500-seat arena. Final cost was \$110,000.

On Jan. 2, 1912, the New Westminster Royals visited the Victoria Senators in the first professional hockey game ever played on artificial ice. The visitors won 8-3.

On March 30, 1925, the Victoria team, since renamed the Cougars, beat the Montreal Canadiens 6-1 to claim the Stanley Cup.

Major league pro hockey left Victoria at the end of the following season. The arena burned down in an early morning fire in November 1929. The corner stood empty for decades.

Today, the modest Cranmore Court and Wellington Place apartment buildings stand on the site of the arena. No plaque marks the spot, an oversight in a city so rich in history.

Tom Hawthorn is a Times Colonist sports writer.