



On June 21st we celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day.

We honour this day in a path forward to Truth and Reconciliation. First celebrated as a special day in 1945, it was declared National Aboriginal Peoples Day in 1996 by then Governor General of Canada Roméo LeBlanc. In 2017 it became known as National Indigenous Peoples Day.

What is National Indigenous Peoples Day? It is a day for all Canadians to recognize and celebrate the unique heritage, diverse cultures and contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis indigenous peoples. For generations, many have celebrated their culture on or near this date, due to the significance of the summer solstice as the longest day of the year.

When Stanley Park was opened in 1888 and named after Lord Stanley (who at the time was Canada's Governor General) it had actually been inhabited for more than an estimated 3000 years by the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-waututh people.

Due to the abundant resources in the area such as cedar bark, shellfish, waterfowl and deer, many First Nations villages existed on the shores of Burrard Inlet in what is known today as Stanley Park. One of the more prominent villages, Xwayxway (pronounced "whoi-who") was located on the eastern peninsula of the park, at what is called Lumberman's Arch. Meaning "Place of the Mask", it was believed a mask arrived there from the Spirit World, leaving its ceremony and song for the Coast Salish to honour its memory. With protection from prevailing winds and calm waters for landing canoes, people from surrounding villages gathered here by the thousands for potlaches to celebrate community events.

By the late 1800s, Xwayxway had grown to be the largest settlement in the area with a longhouse made from large cedar posts and slabs, measuring 60 metres long and nearly 20 metres wide. Eleven families lived there, numbering around 100 extended family members.

In 1861, Richard C. Moody, a British colonial governor and commander of the Royal Engineers, instructed the land to be surveyed for military use. With BC joining the federation (Canada) in 1871 the lands officially became federal lands. With the implementation of the Terms of Union and the creation of reserve lands through the Joint Reserve commission, the lands had already been taken for a "military reserve" and therefore could not be used as an Indian reserve.

With colonial British expansion from the east following the opening of the transcontinental railroad in 1886, Vancouver started to boom in population. The First Nations inhabitants of Vancouver, including those living in Xwayxway and nearby Senakw in Kitsilano were seen as an impediment to development, and were forcibly evicted to reserves. In 1886, the city demolished Xwayxway and created the Park Drive perimeter road. Remnants of the village which included 8 foot deep shell layers as well as villagers' belongings and even ancestral remains, were used as a road bed for this first road around Stanley Park.

Prior to this, over by Lost Lagoon the Coast Salish people had been harvesting shellfish as a food staple from the tidal flats. However, with the building of the Stanley Park Causeway, it changed from a saltwater marsh to a freshwater pond becoming a refuge for water birds.

Most recently, in 2010 Squamish Nation Chief Ian Campbell proposed that Stanley Park be renamed Xwayxway Park after the name of the original village.

If you have an interest in learning more about reconciliation please consult the SPLBC website and visit the Original Caretakers under the History tab.