Law and Order

The oldest police force in western Canada had its hands full as the population of the tiny outpost exploded during the Gold Rush. Those who came to the frontier coast were often not the most compliant or conventional!

Victoria's Finest

After the gold rush began, brothels quickly appeared in Victoria. Stella Carroll, an ambitious 25 year-old from San Francisco, visited a friend who happened to be selling her brothel. When the buyer suddenly died, Stella decided to make the purchase herself. Her new landlord was Simeon Duck, a well-connected local politician with a liberal attitude to prostitution. She operated the brothel successfully for many years until Duck died in 1905, the same time as an era of moral reform was emerging. The new Mayor and Police Chief soon met with Stella and they agreed that if she moved to the red-light district the police would not trouble her.

Stella complied, but was forced to move several more times, partly because she was so difficult. She would sue non-paying customers in court, though good sense should have told her not to. When the police arrested her and hauled her into court, she would rage at the magistrate. Her private life also caused problems. She had violent lovers, one of whom "accidentally" shot her in the leg, resulting in it being amputated. Although her Rockwood Manor was the "finest" brothel in town for years, she eventually returned to San Francisco.

Eversole, Linda J (2005). Stella: Unrepentant Madam. Surrey: Touchwood Editions.

1 600 Block Humboldt – In the 1800s, Humboldt Street was a rough part of town and a hangout for cut-throats and thieves. **Kanaka Row** was its original name, after Hawaiian Islanders (Kanakas) who first lived in wooden cabins here. A smelly inlet stood where the Empress Hotel is now, which may have attracted the unsavoury crowd. Knifings, fights and murders were common occurrences.

The Union Club (805 Gordon Street) was built in 1912. It was founded in the 1870s as a place for elite men in Victoria to socialize. The first president was well-known to city criminals. He was Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, Chief Justice of British Columbia – also known as the "Hanging Judge."

The Union Club first occupied a building a block away where members often drank and gambled away their evenings. There were rumours of a tunnel which would have provided easy access to a nearby bawdy house. Years later, remains of a tunnel were indeed found! The club still operates at its current location, 805 Gordon Street. Women are now welcome and enter through the front door.

2 Government Street – A colourful criminal in the 1860s was John Butts, who also served as the town crier. He was once paid to keep the streets clean until his antics were discovered. He would gather garbage along Government Street, dump the load on nearby Yates Street, then pick it up and dump it back on Government Street again! He was also involved in bootlegging and stealing, for which he served many terms in the local chain gang.

3 1001 Government Street – A German submarine sank the passenger liner *Lusitania* in May of 1915. She had been carrying 1,200 passengers bound for Europe, many of whom were Canadians going to support the war effort. One of those killed was the son of Kathleen Dunsmuir, who was well-loved by Victorians for a canteen she had been running for Canadian soldiers in France. Following the sinking, mobs took to the street ransacking any business associated with Germany. One of these was the club, **Germania Sing Verein**, located upstairs. The club's windows were smashed and a piano was heaved onto the sidewalk. The looting continued as the Mayor read the Riot Act to the unruly crowd the following day.

Abridged from Stephen Ruttan, "Stella: When Only the Best Will Do." Victoria Times Colonist, October 28, 2012.

KEEP WALKING

4 **1200 Government** – One of British Columbia's most famous architects, **Francis Mawson Rattenbury,** designed the Bank of Montreal building (now the Irish Times Pub) and Victoria's Parliament Buildings. Rattenbury divorced his first wife Florence in the 1920s after commencing a scandalous affair with a much younger woman. Shunned by their friends, the new couple married and moved to England where she soon fell in love with their 19-year-old chauffeur. One night not long after, her new lover took a carpenter's mallet and clubbed Rattenbury to death! Though charges against her were dropped, she committed suicide a few days later by stabbing herself and falling in a river.

5 **Trounce Alley** – Directly across the road you will find a quaint alley, marked by an iron gate and authentic gaslights. It was built and privately owned by architect **Thomas Trounce**. When he improved public access to the alley, the City forced him to put up gates at each end to keep it "private." Secure and well lit, the alley then became a popular rendezvous point for prostitutes and their clients.
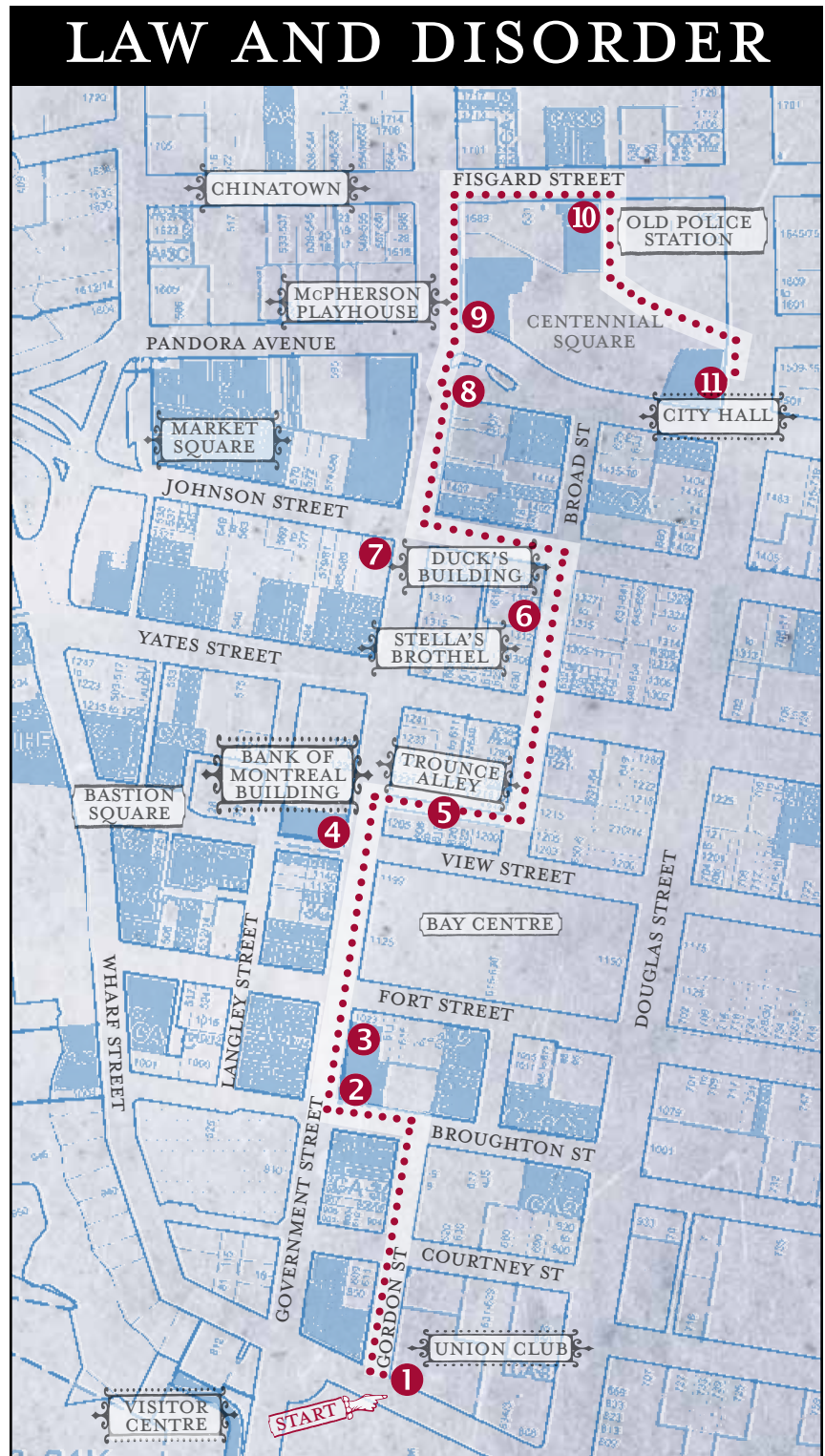
6 **1318 Broad Street** – The Duck's Building was owned by Simeon Duck, once BC's Minister of Finance. Tragedy struck in 1864, when a night watchman named Thomas Barrett was investigating a minor break-in. While following a suspect down a dark alley by the building, he suddenly saw another dark figure approaching. When the person ignored his warning, Barrett raised his gun and fired. The shot instantly killed Constable John Curry, a 24-year-old member of Victoria's police force, who had been responding to the watchman's initial calls for help.

7 **Government at Johnson** – Johnson Street was notorious in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Saloons, brothels and dance halls lined the street. "Shanghaiing", where a person was abducted and forced to work on a ship, was common here. In 1881 the skeleton of one likely victim, with his jaw sliced in two, was found under the Omineca Saloon (now a Native Craft shop). A lonely miner likely put up too much of a fight with his kidnappers.

8 **Government at Pandora** – Opium smuggling from Victoria to the United States was common until 1908 when Canada outlawed the drug. Big-time smuggler Jimmy Carroll escaped capture until 1885 when one of his men squealed. A detective followed Jimmy to the **Tai Yune Opium Factory** (which stood close to the middle of this intersection) and overheard plans about a drug shipment. Jimmy was arrested with a boatload of opium as soon as he entered American waters.

9 **1600 Government** – The **McPherson Playhouse** is linked to a famous scandal. Built in 1914, it was part of the chain of theatres owned by the Greek-American tycoon Alexander Pantages. In 1929, Pantages was charged with raping a 17-year-old dancer in Los Angeles and sentenced to 50 years in jail. Some say he was set up by Joseph Kennedy, the father of future President JFK, because Kennedy wanted to take over the theatre chain. True or not, the scandal ruined Pantages both financially and emotionally.

10 **625 Fisgard** – You are now in Victoria's Chinatown. With its brothels, gambling dens and labyrinth of alleyways, it once scandalized Victoria's "proper" establishment. Nearby at City Hall, the oldest municipal police force west of the Great Lakes set up shop. Policing Victoria's unruly population was a tough job in the 1800s. Crimes consisted mainly of disorderly conduct and petty theft. Drunk driving was also a big problem and many an inebriated miner had his horse confiscated for the night. The police station eventually moved to the old central part of this building across from the Chinese Public School.

11 **#1 Centennial Square – City Hall** has seen its share of disorderly conduct since the first wing opened in the 1870s. One case involves Joseph Carey, Mayor in 1884. The City owed a lawyer just over $700, but Carey stubbornly refused to pay the bill. To recover the debt, the court finally ordered the sheriff to place an armed guard at City Hall and put some of the City's assets up for auction. The sale was cancelled only when some public-spirited citizens came forward with the money. Carey was trounced in the next election.