

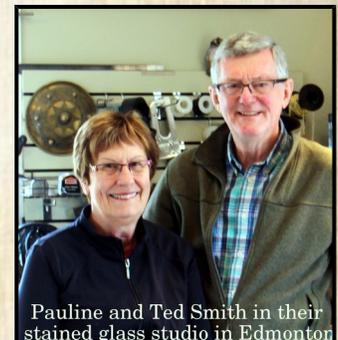
Mister Smith's Walking Stick

For thirty years **Mr. Ted Smith** admired the ebony cane that sat on a shelf in his Edmonton stained-glass studio. It is a beautiful item. It has a polished black shaft with an ornate engraved silver head. It came into his possession from his father, **Reverend F. E. Smith**, forty years ago as a gift from a family in the Surrey Anglican parish over which he presided. The engraving on the head reads, "**Presented to J.F. Smith, by the pupils of Victoria High School, June 23, 1893.**" Interestingly, **Ted Smith** has no family connection to the person identified on the head of the cane; however the family that gave it to his father felt the name similarity would make it an appropriate keepsake.



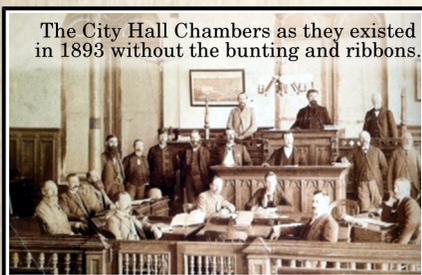
Twenty years ago, **Ted Smith** made an effort to contact Vic High about the cane, but never received a reply. **Ted** and his wife **Pauline** had made plans to visit Victoria in early March of 2016, and notified the school again about the possibility of donating the cane. Principal **Randi Falls** responded within 20 minutes. "Yes," she said, "the Vic High Archives would very much love to have the cane in their collection." **Ted** was extremely pleased: after 27 years of service with the Royal Alberta Museum, he understands the importance of an artifact being housed where it can be properly displayed and appreciated.

Arrangements were made for the Smiths to meet our Archives volunteer **Deb Blackie** and the cane was accessioned into the Archives' collection. The Smiths had no family stories to pass on to us about the cane; however, their donation has brought to life a moment in the school's history that had almost vanished. For that alone we can't thank them enough.



Pauline and Ted Smith in their stained glass studio in Edmonton

Now determining any further background regarding the cane was going to involve some legwork. I hit it lucky on the first try.



The City Hall Chambers as they existed in 1893 without the bunting and ribbons.

The Victoria Daily Colonist, 24 June 1893.

Headline: The City Hall. **Scene:** the Closing Ceremonies of the Victoria High School. The report lays out the scene in the distinctive media language of that period. It carries a tone of reverence and respect that isn't heard much in today's parlance.

There is a great deal made of the transformation of the grim and dreary surroundings of the city chambers, where the closing exercises for 1893 were held, to an inviting and cheerful atmosphere. Sedate parents, children dressed in gay dresses with bright ribbons, and dignified gentlemen occupying the presiding platform. There

were a number of clergymen involved in the ceremony overshadowed by the dominant figure of legendary principal **Edward B. Paul** and trustee **D. Smith**. Included at the head table was our protagonist **Mr. J. F. Smith**.

During the course of the ceremony, it was announced that **Mr. Smith** was leaving the Vic High staff. His fellow staff members presented him with a dictionary, with accompanying stand. A student, **H. Dickenson**, presented him with a handsome walking stick on behalf of all the pupils of Division 20.

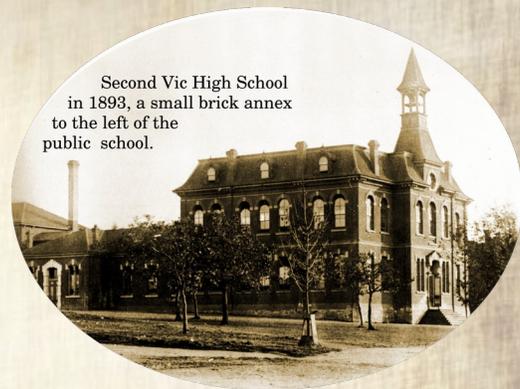
The *Daily Colonist* went on to publish **H. Dickenson's** entire speech. **Mr. J. F. Smith** responded to the presentations with a great deal of praise for both the staff and students of Victoria High. However, as there was no mention of his future plans, that is where his historical trail vanishes.



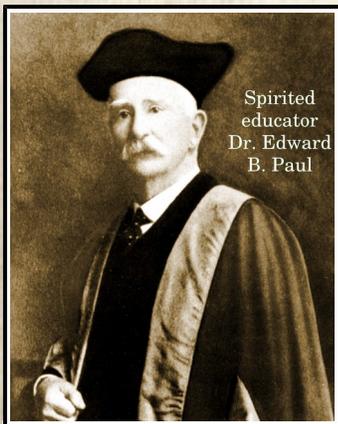
As best as I could determine, **Mr. J. F. Smith** was a bachelor living in a bed-sitting room in a boarding house on Superior Street in James Bay. By 1894 he is no longer mentioned in the City Directory. There were some major migratory events during that period worth considering, however, notably the Klondike Gold Rush. Over 100,000 men and women made their way, from the port of Victoria, to the Klondike and Alaska from 1896-1898. Using resources at the BC Archives I tracked the diaries and biographies of two J. F. Smiths, but the years and destination points mentioned in the files don't substantiate the possibility of either of these men being *our* J.F. Smith.

It should be mentioned that Victoria High at this period occupied the second of four buildings that served as its home. It was a brick annex built in 1882 on the school reserve grounds currently occupied by Central Middle School. **Edward B. Paul**, appointed Vic High's principal in 1892, later became known as "**the Grand Old Man of Education.**" He became famous for his unyielding attitude toward elected and non-elected officers and administrators, who expressed their annoyance or

demonstrated any sense of entitlement when it came to matters dealing with the business of the local school board. Dr. Paul led a valiant effort, without immediate success, to establish a **University of British Columbia**, which would enable students to continue their post-secondary education close to home. Despite this setback, eventually an agreement was reached with McGill University that allowed high school students in Victoria an opportunity to matriculate. **Victoria College** (of McGill University) accepted its first students in 1903, with classes held in the third Vic High building that had opened the previous year.



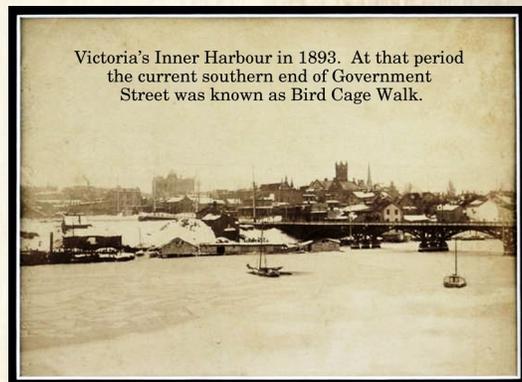
Second Vic High School in 1893, a small brick annex to the left of the public school.



Spirited educator Dr. Edward B. Paul

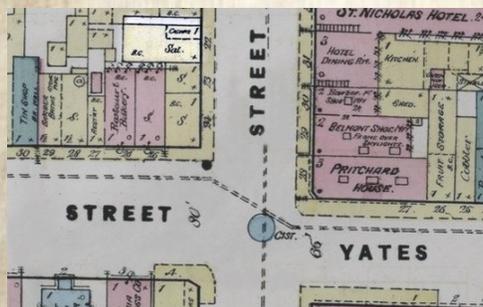
Why choose a walking stick as a gift? It may not be as unusual as one might think. In 1893 a walking stick was the height of male fashion. It was an essential accessory to complement one's appearance. A swagger stick, as it was sometimes called, was a demonstration of one's social status. It could be used as a defensive device or as a companion when walking alone. Men and some ladies would keep a variety of types and styles to suit any occasion. Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson, *The Strand* magazine's popular fictional characters of the time, would never dream of leaving 221B Baker Street without their walking sticks in hand. In Victoria BC, gentlemen of status were no exception. Considering the high esteem that the pupils of Division 20 evidently held for **Mr. J. F. Smith**, the engraved walking stick was a very appropriate gift.

How **Mr. J. F. Smith's** life unfolded we'll probably never find out; but thanks to **Ted** and **Pauline** Smith, one special moment in his life will be remembered.



Victoria's Inner Harbour in 1893. At that period the current southern end of Government Street was known as Bird Cage Walk.

Of course, no Attic tale would be complete without those goodwill Ambassadors, the **Vic High Tankards**, having a role. Therefore, with only a little coercion, we hoisted them into our "*Vic High Archive Way-Back Machine*," and adjusted the dial to 1893, just to get an idea of how today's successful and well-dressed gentlemen would fit into the haberdashery fashion of the late nineteenth century. Not to worry, we'll bring them back to their appropriate historical time slot. My only concern is there may not have been a coffee shop close to **Mr. Greighton's** place of business. Time travel can be a thirsty work.



If you are interested in further information regarding the presentation of Mr. J. F. Smith's cane and the activities surrounding the presentation, Google search online: **Daily Colonist (1893-06-24)**. The press coverage offers a surprisingly clear, and even somewhat jarring description of the social activities, the culture, and the humour of the period.

<< Location of store north of Government and Yates - 1885



The Vic High Tankards enjoying an outing with the staff of Creighton's Upholstery in 1893.

The historic photos in this article are courtesy of the Victoria High Archives and the technical skills of Mr. Eric Earl.

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The Vic High Tankards back home, safe and sound in 2016, and ready for their next adventure and a cup of coffee.

