In 1911 Lester and Frank Patrick, the legendary ice-hockey brothers, moved to the BC coast with the dream of expanding professional ice hockey to Western Canada. Their dream was supported by their athletic skills, their acute business sense, and the wealth of their father Joe’s timber business. The moderate west-coast climate demanded the creation of artificial ice rinks. That year they built the first artificial ice arena in Canada, on Denman Street in Vancouver, a building that held 10,500 spectators. Later the same year they built the Patrick Arena at the corner of Epworth and Cadboro Bay Road, in what was then the remote municipality of Oak Bay, strategically purchasing the lots adjacent to the streetcar tracks. Built entirely of wood, the Patrick Arena was meant to accommodate 3500 spectators, but as many as 4200 managed to shove their way in to attend matches. Frank Patrick managed the Vancouver arena, which was home to the Vancouver Terminals, later nicknamed the Millionaires, and Lester managed the Patrick Arena, which was home to the Victoria Senators, which became the Aristocrats. A third team was the New Westminster Royals, who played out of the Vancouver arena. The three teams played under the banner of the Pacific Coast Hockey Association.
The Patrick Arena opened with a public skating session on Christmas Day, 1911. The first game between New Westminster and Victoria is believed to be the first professional hockey game in Canada played on artificial ice. Skating on artificial ice was an immediate success, and it didn’t take long before amateur leagues began to book ice time. Vic High, then the only high school in Greater Victoria, formed a team and entered it into an Intermediate League, whose teams were composed of younger and second-tier senior athletes sponsored by the YMCA, local retailers, and military associations.

As professional ice hockey was still in its infancy, there were many talented amateurs among the available players. The Daily Colonist reported that many of the players could have been professionals, but remained amateur for philosophical reasons. Teams were composed of seven players in this era and there was no forward passing. One player rushed forward with his teammates trailing in a “V” formation, somewhat like rugby. No blue lines and no redlines -- a very different game from the one we know today.

In 1912 Vic High won the first Intermediate League championship, and also played King Edward High School for the Thompson Cup, emblematic of provincial high-school supremacy. This was two years before the completion of the present Vic High building on Grant Street.
Despite the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 and many students enlisting for military service, Vic High maintained a team and was champion again in 1915. Among the professionals, during the 1914 season the Victoria Aristocrats lost to the Toronto Blueshirts (forerunner of the Maple Leafs) in a Stanley Cup challenge.

In 1916, with no end to the war in sight, the Canadian government took over the Patrick Arena for military training, effectively ending its use for ice hockey, public skating, and community activities. Lester Patrick, anxious to keep his professional team viable, moved his Victoria Aristocrats to Spokane where they were renamed the Canaries. The team folded at the end of the 1917 season; however, after the war the team returned to
Victoria and the Patrick Arena, where they were again known as the Aristocrats. The city went crazy for ice hockey.

Vic High formed a boy’s team and once again joined the Intermediate League. The Patrick’s were also proponents of women’s ice hockey, and no doubt some of Vic High’s female students would have been active in the women’s league at the Patrick Arena.

The Vic High boys team competed in a commercial league from 1918 until 1925, representing the Island in the Thompson Cup almost every year. Nanaimo and Oak Bay also competed for the cup in this era.

In 1922, the *Daily Colonist* reported on not only Vic High’s 1-0 loss to King George High School for the Thompson Cup, but also the remarkable dinner they hosted for their Vancouver visitors. Such was the etiquette of sporting events of the time! Vic High also lost to King George in Vancouver in 1925, but high-school ice hockey then vanished.
The 1922 season also marked the name change of the Aristocrats to the Cougars. As many Victorians are aware, the Cougars were the last Western Hockey League team to challenge for and win the Stanley Cup.

1921-22 Vic high hockey photo

The 1925 Victoria Cougars
In 1926, the Patrick family sold their interests in the Cougars and the Western Hockey League to the National Hockey League (which had merged with the National Hockey Association that had teams in Ontario and Quebec). The Victoria franchise moved to Detroit to become the Cougars, the Falcons, and eventually the Red Wings. Lester Patrick, seeing great opportunity in the pending expansion of professional ice hockey into the USA, relocated to New York, where he was hired to build the New York Rangers franchise. (He kept the family home in Fairfield where he died in 1960.) His sons Lynn (VHS 1931) and Muzz (VHS 1933), both multi-talented athletes, soon followed their father east, and were enrolled at McGill University in Montreal. They played hockey for the Royal Montreal Club before turning professional with the New York Rangers, and both coached and held executive positions in the National Hockey League for many years. Known as the “royal family of hockey,” the Patricks have had four family members named to the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto, and five to the BC Sports Hall of Fame.
The demise of professional hockey in Victoria didn’t end activities in the Patrick Arena, but a fire in 1929 did. With its destruction, Victoria did not have an ice rink until Barney Olsen converted a horse pavilion on the Willows Fairgrounds into an ice arena. This arena, in turn, burned to the ground in 1944.

Even with construction of the Memorial Arena following World War II, high-school ice hockey never regained traction. With the expenses of equipment and ice time, youth and minor hockey associations instead became the home of boys’ ice hockey.

However, to this day Vic High keeps its association with the game by being the official high school of the Royals, Victoria’s Major Junior A team in the Western Hockey League. This year six Royals teammates are enrolled at Vic High. If not on the ice, then certainly in the classroom, Vic High still takes an interest in the education and future of young hockey players.

Barrie Moen

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