

Stephen Hastings Atkins, J.P. — Early Pioneer Settler on the Coquitlam River

Researched and written by Ralph Drew, Belcarra, BC, November 2018.

The 'Colony of British Columbia' was proclaimed at Fort Langley on November 19th, 1858. In early 1859, Colonel Richard Clement Moody, RE, selected the site for the capital of the colony on the north side of the Fraser River where the river branches. The Royal Engineers established their camp at 'Sapperton' and proceeded to layout the future townsite of 'Queensborough' (later 'New Westminster'). On July 17th, 1860, 'New Westminster' incorporated to become the first municipality in Western Canada.

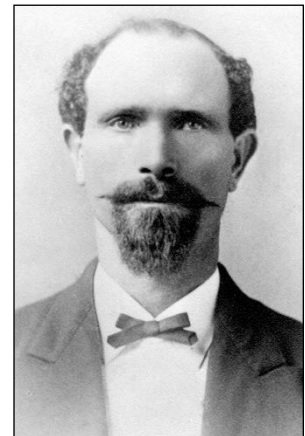
During the winter of 1858–59, the Fraser River froze over for several months and Colonel Moody realized his position when neither supply boat nor gun-boat could come to his aid in case of an attack. As a consequence, Colonel Moody built a "road" to Burrard Inlet in the summer of 1859 as a military expediency, in order that ships might be accessible via salt water. The "road" was initially just a pack trail that was built due north from 'Sapperton' in a straight line to Burrard Inlet. In 1861, the pack trail was upgraded to a wagon road — known today as 'North Road'. ⁽¹⁾ The 'Pitt River Road' from New Westminster to 'Pitt River Meadows' was completed in June 1862. ⁽²⁾

In the summer of 1859, ⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾ the first European family to settle in the Coquitlam area arrived on the schooner 'Rob Roy' on the west side of the Pitt River to the area known as 'Pitt River Meadows' (today 'Port Coquitlam') — Alexander McLean (1809–1889), his wife (Jane), and their two small boys: Alexander (1851–1932) and Donald (1856–1930). ⁽⁵⁾ The McLean family cleared the land, built a log home, and raised milk cows on their 160-acre property (District Lot 231, Group 1, NWD) which McLean pre-empted in 1860. ⁽⁶⁾ In the spring of 1860, Governor James Douglas made a brief stop at the McLean dairy farm and left this description of the area:

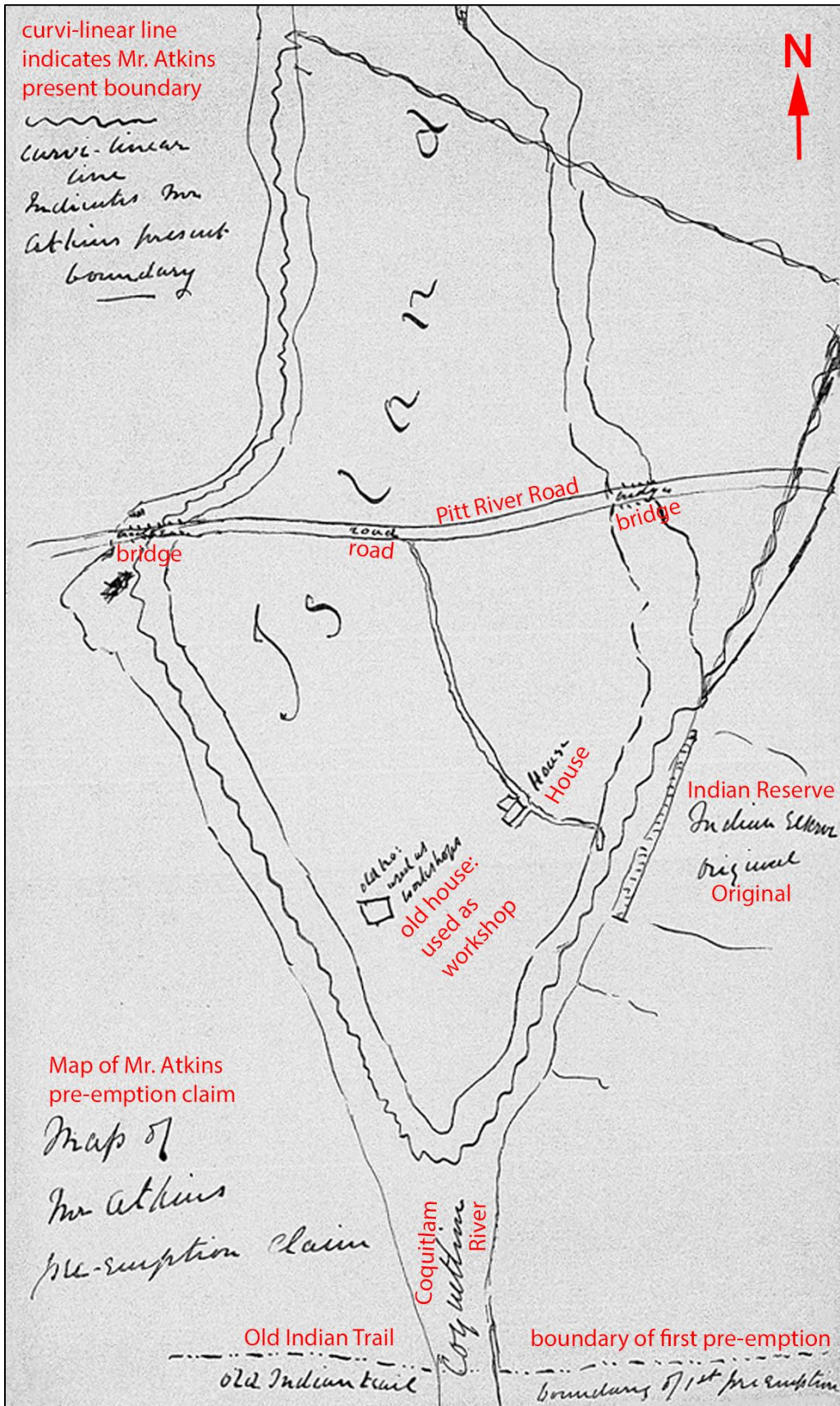
"The banks of the Pitt River are exceedingly beautiful; extensive meadows sweep gracefully from the very edge of the river towards the distant line of forest and mountain. The rich alluvial soil produces a thick growth of grass, interspersed with Michaelmas daisy, the wild rose, and scattered groups of willows." — Governor James Douglas ⁽⁷⁾

In January 1860, ⁽⁸⁾⁽⁹⁾⁽¹⁰⁾ Stephen Hastings Atkins (1793–1870) pre-empted 160 acres that included the south end of the island on the east side of the main channel of the Coquitlam River (DL 174) immediately adjacent to the future Coquitlam Indian Reserve No. 2. In February 1860, S. H. Atkins and his three sons sailed up the Coquitlam River in a boat they had built themselves, landed and built a house. ⁽¹¹⁾

In addition to the McLean and Atkins families, the only other (known) European settler living in the area of the Coquitlam River in 1864 was George Black, a "gentleman gambler" who may have earned his "gambler" title because of horse racing. ⁽¹²⁾ In about 1863, George Black (1831–1896) pre-empted DL289 (167 acres) located on 'Pitt River Road' on the east side of the Coquitlam River, and in 1864 he pre-empted DL290 (97 acres) immediately south of DL289. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Crown Grant #2105 for DL289 was registered to George Black on July 30th, 1879, and DL290 (Crown Grant #2414) was registered on April 1st, 1882.



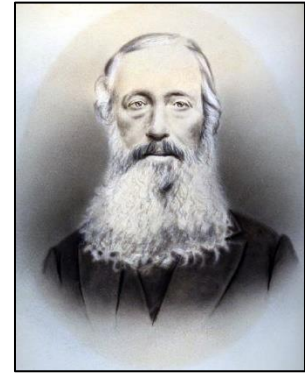
George Black
(NWMA IHP2365)



Source: Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives, Colonial Correspondence, File GR1372.3.46.

1864 Sketch map by S.H. Atkins showing his Pre-emption Claim on the Coquitlam River (District Lot 174, Group 1, NWD).

Stephen Hastings Atkins (1793–1870), J.P., was born on March 29th, 1793 in Ireland. He married his first wife, Elizabeth O'Reilly, on December 20th, 1815, and they had a son Stephen Hastings Atkins, Jr., in September 1816. ⁽¹³⁾ (Elizabeth O'Reilly died in childbirth.) S. H. Atkins, Jr., joined the clergy and was Rector of Tullylish Parish from 1862 to 1873. S. H. Atkins, J.P., died on May 23rd, 1870, at the residence of his son the Rev. S. H. Atkins, in Tullylish, Down, Ireland, at age 77. ⁽¹⁴⁾



S. H. Atkins ⁽¹³⁾

For many years, S. H. Atkins was a 'Justice of the Peace' (J.P.) for the counties of Tipperary, Clare and Limerick in Ireland, and was appointed a 'Magistrate' on January 2nd, 1827, at Tipperary, Ireland. In 1834, he was appointed a 'Magistrate' at Forthenry, Clare, Ireland. S. H. Atkins, J.P., and his family were recorded in Burke's "Landed Gentry of England and Ireland". ⁽¹⁵⁾



Mary Anne Green ⁽¹⁶⁾

Stephen Hastings Atkins, J.P., married Mary Anne Greene (1808–1903) on August 19th, 1825, in Dublin, Ireland, and they had nine children: Robert Greene Atkins (1826–1827), Adele Elizabeth Atkins (1830–1869), Margaret Grace Atkins (1831–1848), Mary Anne Atkins (1833–1902), William Atkins (1836–1920), Remus Henry Atkins (1840–1924), Romulus Robert Atkins (1840–*circa* 1900), Edmund Arthur Atkins (1843–1924), and Henrietta Atkins (1846–1893). ⁽¹³⁾⁽¹⁷⁾

In a letter to Col. R. C. Moody, RE, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, 'Colony of British Columbia', dated December 16th, 1859, ⁽¹⁸⁾ S. H. Atkins referred to the 'Encumbered Estates Act' having "washed me duly" suggesting that he lost his wealth due to the 'Great Famine' in Ireland (see letter below). The 'Encumbered Estates Act' was established by the British Parliament to facilitate the sale of Irish estates whose owners were unable to meet their financial obligations because of the 'Great Famine', a period in Ireland of mass starvation, disease, and emigration between 1845 and 1849. Stephen Hastings Atkins, J.P., and Mary Anne Atkins (*née* Green) and five of their children sailed from London for Australia on June 1st, 1846.

William Atkins (1836–1920) went into the timber business in Victoria, Australia, managing mills and ultimately becoming a construction contractor — which explains S. H. Atkins' periodic trips to Australia in the 1860s. In 1881, William immigrated with his wife from the state of Victoria to Western Australia. Mary Anne Atkins (*née* Green) lived at Victoria, Australia, and in 1881 moved to Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, where she died on June 28th, 1903. ⁽¹⁹⁾



Remus Atkins ⁽²⁰⁾

Remus Henry Atkins (1840–1924), as a boy, was a farmer in Tasmania and British Columbia and was educated in Toronto, Canada. Remus Atkins pre-empted District Lot 343 (Pre-emption Record #11, 160 acres, January 23rd, 1860) ⁽¹⁰⁾ and eventually immigrated to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) — which explains S. H. Atkins' periodic trips to Hawaii in the 1860s. Remus was manager of the 'Halawa Plantation' in Kohala from 1874 to 1885, after which Remus was district magistrate for North Kohala, Hawaii. ⁽²⁰⁾

Victoria [Colony of Vancouver Island]
December 19th, 1859.

Colonel [Richard Clement] Moody, R.E.
Chief Commissioner of Lands & Works
[Colony of British Columbia]

Sir,

Permit me to intrude the following communication upon your kind consideration.

I have held the commission 'Justice of the Peace' for many years for the counties of Tipperary, Limerick and Clare [Ireland], and have been a grand juror of that in which I have resided lies Tipper; a corroboration of which will be found recorded in Burke's 'Landed Gentry of England and Ireland' of which I possess an impression [copy].

Like many other Irish proprietors, the 'Encumbered Estates Act' has washed me duly and am now with a large family at an advanced age obliged to live (in reality) by the sweat of my brow.

With the exception of three sons [Remus, Romulus, & Edmund] and a daughter [Henrietta] now with me in Victoria, my other and older children received an ample education.

My eldest son [Stephen] (an only child by a first marriage), is in the established church, and chaplain to Earl de Grey at Hundley on Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire.

My wife [Mary Anne Atkins], our eldest son [William], aged 24, and our second daughter [Margaret], will follow me here in a few months.

I contemplated previous to my coming to Victoria that they should establish a female school there, and find the field open and favourable for that object.

I brought letters of introduction to the Rev. McCridge who has kindly taken my youngest daughter [Henrietta], aged but 14, into his family.

Mrs. Atkins and our second daughter are good musicians, speak French and are well grounded in English literature, and have instructed in these branches. I believe you have a family; should they require a Governess, it might suit as well as requiring a school (considering it is located on the Coquitlam [River]) that my daughter should take the situation of Governess in your family if desirable on your part, by which Mrs. Atkins would be enabled to take-up her abode with her family there [Coquitlam].

I am an experienced agriculturist, and have in my possession several prizes adjudged me at some of our first cattle shows.

My eldest daughter [Adele], aged 27, resides in the north of Ireland with her aunt whose children she educates; her accomplishments are varied — a good musician, sings well, draws, speaks German and French fluently and possesses a fundamental knowledge of Italian.

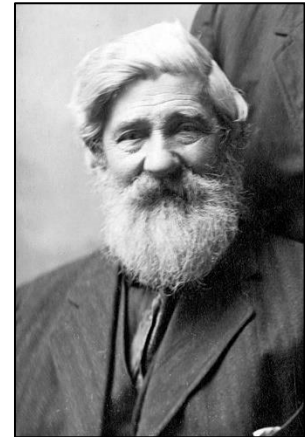
My children and self endeavour to walk as before the Lord's hand and thankful that they are as yet intact from the vices of the world.

Trusting that you will make allowance for the liberty I take and not impute this communication to misplaced pride or bombast.

I have the honour to be your obedient servant,
S. H. Atkins

Romulus Robert Atkins (1840–c.1900), settled on the Coquitlam river with his father and two brothers in January 1860. Romulus Atkins pre-empted District Lot 169 (Pre-emption Record #12, 160 acres, January 23rd, 1860), ⁽¹⁰⁾ and immigrated to Australia in 1865. ⁽²¹⁾

Edmund Arthur ('Ned') Atkins (1843–1924) was born on November 23rd, 1843, in Ireland. He married a First Nations woman named Susan Tahamanke (1848–1903) on January 2nd, 1878, at New Westminster. ⁽²²⁾ Ned worked as a farmer and a millman, and he and his family lived on District Lot 174 for many years. Edmund Arthur Atkins also pre-empted District Lot 168 (Pre-emption Record #147, 160 acres, May 2nd, 1860), ⁽¹⁰⁾ District Lot 382 (Crown Grant #2605, 124 acres, June 6th, 1883), and District Lot 384 (Crown Grant #4225, 24 acres, September 20th, 1892). Ned Atkins was reeve (mayor) of Coquitlam from 1897 to 1904, died on November 29th, 1924, at age 81 and was buried at 'Fraser Cemetery' in New Westminster.



E. A. Atkins
(NWMA IHP2579)

Stephen Hastings Atkins, J.P., was an educated man with many years experience in Ireland as both a 'Justice of the Peace' and a 'Magistrate'. At the age of 70, he hoped to make use of his intellectual skills and professional experience to earn a living as opposed to the physical work of being a farmer. On four occasions during 1863 and 1864, S. H. Atkins wrote to Governor James Douglas seeking to obtain a government appointment with the young 'Colony of British Columbia' as either a 'Justice of the Peace' or a 'Magistrate'. ⁽²³⁾ Unfortunately, his requests were not successful and S. H. Atkins, J.P., eventually returned to Ireland sometime in the late 1860s.

S. H. Atkins clearly states in correspondence with Colonel R. C. Moody ⁽⁸⁾ and Governor Frederick Seymour ⁽⁹⁾ that he pre-empted his 160 acres of Crown Land property on the Coquitlam River in 1860.

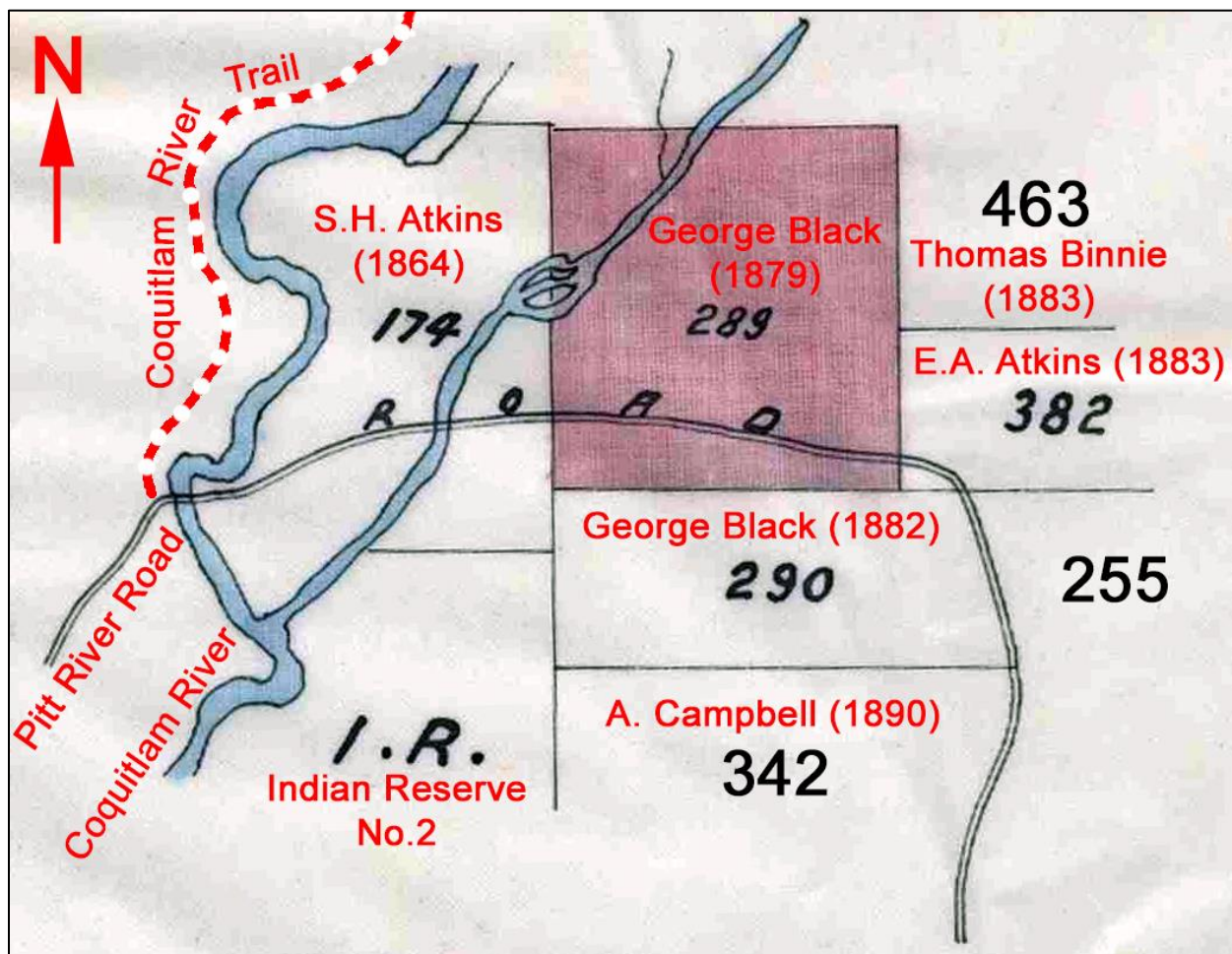
A note by Arthur N. Birch, Colonial Secretary, appended to a letter from S. H. Atkins dated April 16th, 1867, to the Hon. Joseph W. Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, regarding a claim for trees cut on Atkins' property by a contractor repairing a bridge over the Coquitlam River, the Colonial Secretary wrote the following:

"Mr. Atkins lot on which his house stands, has been surveyed and deeded to him. The trees were not cut from this land, however, but at a point about a quarter of a mile along the road towards Pitt River on land claimed by Mr. Atkins through some 'Land Scrip' transaction or transfer of right of which we have no record." – Arthur N. Birch ⁽²⁴⁾

In a letter dated June 17th, 1867, to the Hon. Joseph W. Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, S. H. Atkins responded as follows:

"I presume the government are under a mis-apprehension as to the nature of my occupancy of these lands. I hold them in right of my cultivated land adjoining, for which I have paid the deposit of half the purchase money, and I am not in the position of a pre-emptor without purchase." – S. H. Atkins ⁽²⁵⁾

The B.C. 'Land Title and Survey Authority' states that Stephen Hastings Atkins' 160 acres was a 'Colonial Grant' (59/G) dated February 24th, 1864, and described as "Country Land, New Westminster District, Lot 174, Group 1" that was purchased at private sale on October 30th, 1863, for £33.6.8 (4 shillings and 2 pence per acre). ⁽²⁶⁾



Source: Crown Grant Map for District Lot 289.

Map annotated by Ralph Drew.

1882 map showing Crown Grants to S.H. Atkins (1864), E.A. Atkins (1883), George Black (1879 & 1882), Thomas Binnie (1883), and A. Campbell (1890) — Note: The year each Crown Grant was registered is shown in brackets.

References:

- (1) "North Road – The Burrard Inlet Trail Company, 1859-1860", Blog: Opposite the City, March 6th, 2017, <https://oppositethecity.wordpress.com/>
- (2) "Pitt River Road – Construction Complete", The British Columbian, Saturday, June 21st, 1862.
- (3) "Pioneers Who Have Made Coquitlam", Coquitlam Star, Progress Edition, May 8th, 1912, p. 3 & 5.
- (4) Jeff Rudd, 2010, "When did the Pioneer McLean Family arrive in Port Coquitlam?", PoCo Heritage, Winter 2010, pages 3–7.
- (5) Chuck Davis, 2000, "Where the Rails Meet Rivers: The Story of Port Coquitlam", Harbour Publishing, Madera Park, BC, "The Settlers", pages 24–25.
- (6) "Alexander McLean – Oldest Living Pioneer", Major J. S. Mathews, "Early Vancouver, Vol. 2, 2011 Edition (Originally Published 1933).
- (7) Chuck Davis, 2000, "Where the Rails Meet Rivers: The Story of Port Coquitlam", Harbour Publishing, Madera Park, BC, page 30, quoting Governor Sir James Douglas.
- (8) Letter dated January 11th, 1860, from S. H. Atkins to Col. R. C. Moody, RE, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives, Colonial Correspondence, Atkins, S.H., File GR1372.3.45b.
- (9) Letters dated April 26th, 1864, and November 12th, 1864, and sketch map from S. H. Atkins to Governor Frederick Seymour, Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives, Colonial Correspondence, Atkins, S.H. and R.H., File GR1372.3.46.
- (10) F.W. Laing, 1939, "Colonial Farm Settlers on the Mainland of British Columbia 1858–1871, with an Historical Sketch", Victoria, B.C. ([UBC Library, Special Collections, bcdocs-1.0370066](#)).
- (11) "Coquitlam Then and Now", Coquitlam Public Library, New Horizons For History Committee, City of Coquitlam, B.C.
- (12) Chuck Davis, 2000, "Where the Rails Meet Rivers: The Story of Port Coquitlam", Harbour Publishing, Madera Park, BC, "Where", page 31.
- (13) Atkins Family Tree: Stephen Hastings Atkins, J.P. (1793–1870), <http://members.iinet.net.au/~atkinsrj/Atkins-o/p6.htm#i28>
- (14) W. Mazierre Brady, D.D., "Clerical and Parochial Records of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross", Volume 3, Dublin, 1864.
- (15) John Burke, Bernard Burke, H. Colburn, "A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland", Volume 1, London, 1847.
- (16) Atkins Family Tree: Mary Anne Green (1808–1903), <http://members.iinet.net.au/~atkinsrj/Greene-o/p1.htm>
- (17) Atkins Family Tree: Descendants of Stephen Hastings Atkins, JP, 1793-1870, <http://members.iinet.net.au/~atkinsrj/Atkins-o/ui14.htm>
- (18) Letter dated December 19th, 1859, from S. H. Atkins to Col. R. C. Moody, RE, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives, Colonial Correspondence, Atkins, S.H., File GR1372.3.45b.
- (19) Atkins Family Tree: William Atkins (1836–1920), <http://members.iinet.net.au/~atkinsrj/Greene-o/p1.htm#i27>
- (20) Atkins Family Tree: Remus Henry Atkins (1840–1924), <http://members.iinet.net.au/~atkinsrj/Greene-o/p2.htm#i1959>
- (21) Atkins Family Tree: Romulus Robert Atkins (1840–c.1900), <http://members.iinet.net.au/~atkinsrj/Atkins-o/p6.htm>
- (22) Atkins Family Tree: Edmund Arthur Atkins (1843–1924), <http://members.iinet.net.au/~atkinsrj/Greene-o/p2.htm#i1961>
- (23) Letters dated May 26th, 1863, August 10th, 1863, August 18th, 1863, and January 4th, 1864, from S. H. Atkins to Governor James Douglas, Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives, Colonial Correspondence, Atkins, S.H. and R.H., File GR1372.3.46.
- (24) Note by Arthur N. Birch, Colonial Secretary, appended to a letter dated April 16th, 1867, from S. H. Atkins to Hon. Joseph W. Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives, Colonial Correspondence, Atkins, S.H. and R.H., File GR1372.3.46.

- (25) Letter dated June 17th, 1867, from S. H. Atkins to Hon. Joseph W. Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives, Colonial Correspondence, Atkins, S.H. and R.H., File GR1372.3.46.
- (26) B.C. Land Title and Survey Authority, private email communication, November 7th, 2018.