

Early Vancouver

Volume One

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2011 Edition (Originally Published 1932)

Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1931-1932.

*A Collection of Historical Data, Maps, and Plans Made with the Assistance of
Pioneers of Vancouver Between March and December 1931.*

About the 2011 Edition

The 2011 edition is a transcription of the original work collected and published by Major Matthews. Handwritten marginalia and corrections Matthews made to his text over the years have been incorporated and some typographical errors have been corrected, but no other editorial work has been undertaken. The edition and its online presentation was produced by the City of Vancouver Archives to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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play Indian, climb for crow eggs in the old Reserve; the kok-kok of the cock pheasant has already gone.

Soon they will chop down the black, old fragment, the last of many thousands of forest monarchs out of whose dark and mighty depths grew this magic city.

JSM

NOTE ADDED LATER:

30 December 1931. I notice it has gone. JSM

12 AUGUST 1931 - HOLLYBURN. WEST VANCOUVER. "NAVY JACK'S." SCHOOL. POST OFFICE. THE FIRST HOLLY TREES. MR. AND MRS. JOHN LAWSON.

Paid a visit to Mr. and Mrs. John Lawson, now resident at 22nd and Bellevue Avenue, West Vancouver.

When I arrived before 9 a.m., he was busily at work at the Post Office, now on corner of Marine Drive and 17th Street, and he informed me that, as was his practice, he had been on duty since before 6 a.m.; not a minor achievement for a man over 71. He was the first post master at Hollyburn, and so continues to this day. Mr. Lawson was born on 15 April 1860. He received me with marked courtesy.

I asked Mr. Lawson how he ever came to settle on that part of the shore of Burrard Inlet, now known as West Vancouver, etc., etc., but at that time quite unnamed saved for the sobriquet "Navy Jack's," sometimes "Navy Jack's place," and far beyond, another named point "Skunk Cove," now Caulfields. Mr. Lawson then related that he had joined the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1887, served first as brakeman, then conductor, and after twenty years service had retired. At that time, 1905, he was living at 1023 Pacific Street in the city, a muddy road not long opened up from Burrard Street West, and a chance remark of his brother-in-law (Mrs. Lawson's brother) one day, "I wonder what's across on that shore from Prospect Point?" brought the answer from Mr. Lawson, "I've been wondering that myself."

So the next morning, both got up early, got a boat, and started to cross. They knew nothing of the swift currents of the First Narrows, but were driven by them outside the Narrows in the general direction of the north shore, finally landed and took to the woods. They found a logging trail which had been graded for the Moodyville Logging Railway, but it had never been finished—no rails had been laid, although the ties lay all around, and there were half a dozen flat cars in the bushes. It looked as though they had been there some years. The whole place was badly overgrown. "We struck out," said Mr. Lawson, "up the trail, and soon came to the Old Keith Road, equally badly overgrown. It had been built about 1890 or 1891.

"We continued along the old road until we reached about here" ("here" meaning the corner of 17th Street and Marine Drive), "when we came to a fence, an old one, and my brother-in-law or I remarked, 'Here, what's this?' We investigated, and found Navy Jack's house. We went down to the shore."

What was Navy Jack's proper name? I asked.

"John Thomas. Navy Jack had gone up to Barkerville, and died suddenly. We afterwards found that J.C. Keith held the property. He had got it through lending two thousand dollars to Navy Jack, and finally it fell into his hands. Navy Jack married an Indian woman, and his daughter, Mrs. Williams, a woman of able mind, is living on the Indian Reserve now. You must see her.

"I felt when I saw this place that I had never seen a spot on this earth that I would so well like to make my home," said Mr. Lawson, with feeling emphasis, and then, as we subsequently walked over the actual location of his early efforts, and his recollections passed back of the years to the

early simplicity of his first home, he remarked with emotion, "It certainly was a beautiful place twenty years ago."

Today the original "Hollyburn" is somewhat the worse for wear, the fences down, the tennis court a patchwork of dried grass and dust holes in which children play with sand, a plentiful scattering of cigarette boxes, empty, lunch papers, and other debris of picnics.

NAVY JACK'S HOUSE.

Mr. Lawson then invited me to accompany him to view the original site of the house. We went down 17th Street to Argyll Street, then a little west along a narrow macadam road perhaps fifty yards, until we stood between a house numbered 1768 Argyll Street, and the old, now disused, Pacific Great Eastern Railway tracks. Here, among the cherry and walnut trees, was a clear space, quite small, the original site of the house that Navy Jack built. It has been moved slightly to the west, and a little nearer the shore, and is now occupied by a Mrs. Hookham. It has been much altered, both inside and out, but much of the original remains, and in places the old-time square-cut nails show up in the lumber. The house has been raised to form a basement; the front has now stucco-covered posts. The interior still shows the narrow, perhaps three-inch, V-jointed lining, with a very deep V, and it is the old-time one inch, not the so-called one inch—actually three-quarters—of modern dimensions. The whole is now quite remodelled, and not recognisable from a photo of the first Navy Jack's. The little creek runs to the east side of the house; formerly, it was on the west.

It is evident that one of the reasons which governed Navy Jack in the location of his first shack was this creek; the old story of all our early houses, shacks, camps, etc., they were all built near water—springs or creeks.

"This is Navy Jack's actual house, the one in which he lived; one can hardly say worked, for he left most of that to his women. Perhaps he did have a sort of shack prior to this house; I don't know," said Mr. Lawson.

Mr. Lawson afterwards showed me a photograph of the house. "It is identically the same here as it was when I first saw it, save for the addition of the two chimneys and the gable roof in front, which I added." The picture shows it to be about twenty feet wide with door in centre, and two large windows of four panes each, one on each side of the door. Four turned and ornamented verandah posts with peculiar batten and board roof, slightly concave, to verandah. The house roof is shingle, and the whole of one half, including the gable end, faces the shore. The two chimneys, one at each end of the house, pass through the ridge. Before the house stands the two famous holly trees, one partly hidden behind an old-style motor car; the occasion is that of the wedding of their eldest daughter about 1910, the first "church" wedding in West Vancouver. Otherwise, it is exactly as Navy Jack left it.

Note: refer to "Jim" Smith's (J.A. Smith) story of the rooster crowing one 24th May (Queen's Birthday) and guiding a shipload of excursion from Victoria through the fog to the Narrows, 1888 or 1890.

12 AUGUST 1931 - HOLLYBURN AND THE FAMOUS HOLLY TREES.

The photo shows two small holly trees in front of the house. As they grew too large, they were subsequently removed, and are now on the west side of 17th Street, near the shore and picnic ground. Representations since made to the Reeve of West Vancouver have secured a promise that these trees will be protected from vandals, and a promise that he hopes to have them removed to the front of the Municipal Hall when additions are made to that structure. It is from these two holly trees that Hollyburn takes most of its name.

"I was working for the C.P.R. and one day in 1907 I took two holly trees, which were growing in my garden at 1023 Pacific Street, over to our new estate, and planted them. On my trips back and forth on the trains, I used to lie awake in my berth in the caboose trying to think of a suitable