

Early Vancouver

Volume One

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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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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

name for the place. I tried many, until finally one night I thought of 'burn' which meant brook or creek. I added 'holly,' and that is how it was; I invented the word," added Mr. Lawson, and continued. "The walnut trees were about ten years old when we came here; that would make them 35 years old now, but the cherry trees are at least fifty years old. This property was preempted about 1872," and I remarked to him that that was about the time many preemptions were made; Greer's Beach (Kitsilano) was preempted, first in 1871, then in 1873. The fruit trees show, leafless, in the photo.

THE FIRST POST OFFICE.

The first post office—Mr. Lawson being the postmaster—was in a small room, probably ten feet by ten feet at the southeast angle of the house.

TAME DEER.

"Our first tame deer was a buck, and became so very tame that it entered the house," related Mr. Lawson. "One Christmas, Mrs. Lawson placed the Christmas pudding on the table, and while her back was momentarily turned, the deer ate the pudding on the table, and then jumped out of an open window. The second deer was secured when, being chased by some strange dog, it ran into the sea, and two men, passing in a boat, secured it and were about to cut its throat when Mrs. Lawson shouted to them to bring it in alive. It was a doe. I gave them \$10 for it. It was quite young. Soon afterwards, two men caught another one in the water; it was 'all in,' exhausted. I bought it, took it to the stable in a wheelbarrow, rubbed it and rubbed it, and finally it got its strength back. Later, it had two little fawns; that made five deer in all, so we built a little yard, then a larger one, and took in part of the creek. All these deer were caught close to the house."

Mr. Lawson was very fond of horses and had some splendid driving and riding specimens. Some of them appear in a picture given me of his farm on the shore. He had some splendid specimens of black Irish cattle.

The beauty of this Hollyburn forest retreat twenty or more years ago, its silence, its primeval verdure, its mountains and its sea, must indeed have been enchanting. No wonder Mr. Lawson looked back in fond recollection, and not without regret of its passing. The little old house framed in the green of cherry and walnut trees, the smooth lawn of the tennis court, the tiny creek rippling by, cold and clear, the boulder-strewn shore lapped by the waters of English Bay, the distant forest of Stanley Park, the noble bluff of Prospect Point, the verdant background of forest stretching away to the mountain top, the sunshine and the silence, the black cattle in the pasture, and the tame deer in the pen—a charming place of happy memory.

THE FIRST WHARF.

The remains of the old government wharf at the foot of 17th Street can still be seen, a narrow elevation of gravel between logs which originally supported it—the same gravel as has given its name to a certain quality commonly used in making concrete. The original "Navy Jack" (gravel) came from an excavation on the shore just east of the old wharf, a surface pit from which Vancouver got its first gravel for the concrete of its buildings, and which gave its name, or its owner's name, to a building material now universally known throughout British Columbia as "Navy Jack."

12 AUGUST 1931 - THE FIRST SCHOOL AND WEDDING.

The first wedding in West Vancouver was that of Mr. John Hart to Mrs. Lawson's sister, but the first wedding in a church, or perhaps "church wedding form," was held in the first school room, and was that of Mr. Lawson's eldest daughter Elizabeth Catherine, now Mrs. W.J. Pitman. A picture of this wedding, taken on the steps of Navy Jack's house, is in the Archives.

NOTE ADDED LATER:

(City Archives C.V.P. Out. 80 N. Out. 22.)