

**PASSAGE ISLAND:  
From 1792 to 1999**

**by  
Ken White**

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# **PASSAGE ISLAND**

## **Introduction**

*"Gentlemen. Men like Matthews here are worth their weight in gold"*  
*Sir Arthur Currie, 1932*

This is the first book written about Passage Island, British Columbia. The island has a long and interesting history and is located only one mile off shore from the city of West Vancouver yet when one steps foot on the island one is instantly transported to another world, one without cars or any public services or utilities. The island is easily seen from the University of British Columbia, Spanish Banks, and Kitsilano Beach in Vancouver. To those in Vancouver, Passage Island looks like a distant, isolated, remote island and residents and tourists in the city simply ask "I wonder who lives there?"

The author has now researched the history of the island as well as its current status and its future direction resulting in the founding of the Passage Island Archives which contains every item published and unpublished about the island as well as interviews with as many people as possible who have ever lived on the island. This book is the result of the founding of the Archives.

The history of Passage Island was constructed by collecting information and searching the UBC Library, the Vancouver Public Library, the Vancouver City Archives, the GVRD library, the Malaspina College Library, The B.C. Provincial Archives, the New Westminster Land Title Office, the Bowen Island Archives, the New Westminster Library and Archives, the Yukon Archives, the Alaska State Archives and other sources. A very important source is the many Passage Islanders who contributed their own historic material and stories. Some of these stories are simply known as "Passage Island Legends" as the original source has been forgotten. Long time islanders Phil, Julie, and Chad Matty, Jorg and Mika Helssen, Ken and Ruth Slade, Eleanor Worman, Dorothy Rizer, Edna Knowlton, Bill and Elizabeth Griffin, Cathy Mari, Eric Norlin, Rick Speedie, Bonnie Morris, Wolfgang Strigel, Drew White, Deb Anderson, Bill, Jan, and Jennifer Mulder, Jan and Clive Baxter, Zoltan Korai-Kuun, Simon Scott, Bill Forsyth, Traute and Helmer Scholtz, Buff Allen and others all contributed to the collection of materials and stories.

Much of the early history and photographs were obtained from the Vancouver City Archives. These archives are a story of their own

and are only available due to the diligence of Major J.S. Matthews who was the official Vancouver Archivist from 1933 until his death in 1970 at the age of 91. The only way to appreciate the enormous work of Major Matthews is to make a personal visit to the archives and page through his seven volumes of "Early Vancouver" which contain an enormous number of interviews, recollections, photographs. Major Matthews had to be a workaholic! He interviewed every pioneer he could find, including Indian chiefs. He often stayed up until 2 AM writing down everything and painfully indexing all photos and facts. He interviewed people in his office or at their homes and many brought him old photographs which he carefully catalogued. He apparently did not think too many people would read his work as Volume I of "Early Vancouver" was typed with only one carbon copy in 1931, the copy was given to the Vancouver Public Library. When he started Volume II in 1932 he planned ahead and typed two carbon copies: one for the Provincial Archives in Victoria and one for the Parliamentary Library in Ottawa. Later he realized that he under estimated the demand for these volumes. So, in 1946, further copies were typed of Volume I and in 1959 five more copies of Volume II were made by retyping from the original. (These were the days before Xerox machines). These two volumes were later printed and published in 1959 by the Brock Webber Printing Company of Vancouver and copies are available in several Vancouver libraries.

When Volume III was started Major Matthews realized he did not have his own copy and made three carbon copies so he could have one copy at home. Thus, there were four copies made of Volumes IV, V, VI, and VII. This would allow complete sets for the Vancouver City Archives, the Victoria Provincial Archives, the Ottawa Parliamentary Library and for his own home. I could find no evidence of further copies of these volumes, although some may exist. When you read them at the Vancouver City Archives, you must register and are only allowed to read one volume at a time as they are kept in the back room. Major Matthews did make a very detailed index of all seven volumes.

# **PASSAGE ISLAND**

## **Geography and Weather**

*"Howe Sound, immediately adjoining Burrard Inlet ..on the north is an extensive though probably useless sheet of water..."*

*...Captain George Richards, 1864.*

*"This Is The Place to Live"*

*...Queen Elizabeth, 1939*

## **Geography**

The legal description is currently Plan: 12053 District Lot:841 in New Westminster Land District. When the island was originally sold as Crown Land the legal description was just District Lot 841. In 1965 Plan 12053 for the subdivision of the island was registered specifying Lots 1-61. The island is located in the Queen Charlotte channel, Howe Sound. The island was named by Captain George Vancouver on June 14, 1792. When in line with the peak on Anvil island serves as a guide to clear the shoals at the mouth of the Fraser river.

"Passage Island is 2.8 kilometres (1.5 nautical miles) west of Point Atkinson in southeastern Howe Sound. ...Caution should be exercised when anchoring, because of the submerged rocks northeast of the islet. The area's exposure to winds from Georgia Strait may also make anchoring difficult. A tended boat is advised on windy days". (Trepanier, p. 74)

## **Weather**

Captain Vancouver when sailing by Passage Island in June of 1792 found the wind "excessively boisterous..attended with heavy squalls and torrents of rain.." (Howard, p.19).

In August of 1997, a rare electrical storm brought thousands of lightening bolts to Howe Sound and struck trees on Bowen Island. Clive Baxter was sitting on his deck on Passage Island when a bolt came down in front of him. It did not cause any damage but he found that his inverter had to be restarted. Apparently, the electricity in the air had been enough to cause an overload.

## **Other Passage Islands of the World**

In addition to Passage Island B.C., there are three others in the world. Passage Island, Michigan is in Lake Superior. There is a Passage Island in the Andaman Islands group off the coast of India. Among the Falkland Islands close to West Falkland is another Passage Island. In the Caribbean are The Passage Islands

# PASSAGE ISLAND

## Early History

*"The waves go over it all the time"  
...August Jack Khahtsahano*

### I. Squamish Indians

Major Matthews, the Vancouver City Archivist, spent much time trying to find the Squamish Indian names for many locations around Vancouver. He would interview many Indians and ask them the names. There was considerable disagreement about the proper pronunciation and English spelling of these names. In Volume II (p. 30) he mentions that the term "EYE-SY-ICH" according to Chief Paull or "EYE-SYCHE" according to August Jack Khahtsahlano means "sheltered waters" and was used to describe the area "inside Passage Island and between Point Atkinson and Gibson's Landing". Matthews produced a map of the Squamish names and places (in very fine print) and Passage Island is noted as SMIS-MUS-SULCH which is the name given by August Jack which means "The waves go over it all the time".

Meanwhile, Professor Charles Hill-Tout, the director of the Vancouver City Museum and the man who named Kitsilano Beach in 1905, said the name was "Mitlmetlelch".

Robert Bringhurst, formerly of Bowen Island, has researched the Squamish legends and place names. Bowen Island was named by the British Captain Richards in 1859 but the Squamish name is Xwli'l'xhwm which means Fast Drumming Ground, which was also the title of his article in the *Howe Sound Review*. Passage Island was called Smetlmetlel'ch. Bringhurst states the Squamish legend of Xhais:

"Its place names recorded the doings of Xhais, the transformer, who adjusted the world in such a way that no creature had too much power over another. Xhais, who could cut himself up and put himself back together again, often took the form of four brothers, shamans who sometimes altered themselves in turn into three human beings and a two-headed sealskin canoe." (p. 5)

"Passage Island, Smetlmetlel'ch, is, I think, where the Xhais brothers were welcomed into the Squamish Country." (p.7)

So the three candidates for the Squamish name for Passage Island are Smetlmetlel'ch, Mitlmetlelch, and Smis-mus-sulch. There is a preference for Smis-mus-sulch as it appears on one map and is also the easiest to pronounce.

## II. European Explorers

In the summer of 1791 the Spanish Lieutenant Jose Maria Narvaez set out to explore the area around Vancouver in his ship the "Banta Saturnina". His map shows Bowen Island, which he named "Is. de Apodaca" and Passage Island is on the map but not named. He also named "Is. de Langara" which is now Point Grey and "Is. Zepeda" which is now Point Roberts. Narvaez Drive in Vancouver was named after him in 1941. As Narvaez sailed out of Howe Sound an Indian scout was sitting on a hill on the west side of Smis-mus-sulch (Passage Island) and watched Narvaez pass southbound between Bowen Island and Passage Island followed by a pair of Indian canoes. This scene was drawn by August Jack Khahtsahlano and brought to Major Matthews on March 14, 1939 for the Vancouver City Archives and is in their collection as Pho N.153.P.226. August Jack also drew a modern day picture of himself in a canoe (with motor) going past Point Atkinson with Passage Island shown.

In 1792, Captain George Vancouver explored the region with two ships, the *Discovery* and the *Chatham*. He left the ships around the area of what is now Birch Bay in Washington State and sailed and rowed up to the Vancouver area in the Yawl of the *Discovery* and was greeted by about 50 Indians near Stanley Park and they traded cooked fish for iron. He named Passage Island on June 14 because it was in the middle of the passage. When the island is in line with the peak on Anvil island it is a guide to clear the shoals off the mouth of the Fraser river. His famous chart names Burrards Canal, Pt Atkinson, Pt Grey, Howe's Sound, Anvil Island, and Passage Island. Captain Vancouver met some Spanish ships on June 21 and was shown Narvaez's chart and they exchanged charts. He then returned to the *Discovery*.

In 1859, Captain Richards on the H.M.S. Plumper was sent to Burrard Inlet to investigate rumours of valuable coal deposits in the area. His survey map is quite accurate and shows outlines of the Vancouver region very much like it is today. The map clearly shows "Passage Island" labeled in the Queen Charlotte Channel. (Map is shown on P. 26 of Pethick)

## III. The Keith Family

Pethick(p.92) shows a portrait of John Charles Keith with the following caption:

"Born in Scotland in 1858, the son of an Anglican minister, he became the first manager of the Vancouver branch of the Bank of B.C. when it opened on September 1, 1886"

However, his name actually was James Cooper Keith. He arrived in Victoria on February 29, 1876 and married Anne Jane Finlayson in 1879. He first became a bank clerk in Victoria before moving to Vancouver.

J.C. Keith was the first manager of the Vancouver branch of the Bank of British Columbia which later merged with the Bank of Commerce (and later became the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce). The bank was at the site of the current Canadian Pacific Railway station and was opened in September of 1886 after the great fire which burned most of Vancouver in June. When the first customer came in the bank to cash a \$100 money order, Keith gave him \$110. When notified of the error, he refused to believe it and said "Bankers don't make mistakes" and he told him to leave.

Keith was also president of the Howe Sound, Pemberton Valley and Northern Railway which ran eight miles out of Squamish. This railroad was purchased in 1913 as the Pacific Great Eastern. In addition, he was President of the East Vancouver Land and Improvement Company, Vancouver Estates Ltd., the Howe Sound and Northern Railway and the West Shore and the Northern Land Co. At one time he also served as President of the Board of Trade and the Director of the North Vancouver Land and Improvement Company. Keith was well known for his land speculation and had extensive land holdings in the North Vancouver district and Howe Sound but these days is only remembered for "Keith Road" which winds up and down West Vancouver. The road was constructed in 1892 and ran the whole length of "North Vancouver" from Eagle Harbor to Deep Cove up the North Arm of Burrard Inlet.

In 1931, Major Matthews interviewed John Lawson, the first Hollyburn postmaster who was still on the job at the age of 71. Lawson gave detailed accounts of the settlement of the North Shore and discussed his first visit to the area in 1905:

"The whole place was badly overgrown...We struck out up the trail and soon came to the Old Keith Road, equally badly overgrown. It has been built around 1890 or 1891".

Lawson had been discussing the life and property (around 17th Street and Marine Drive in West Vancouver) of "Navy Jack", an old-timer and the common name for the area named after Jack 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 though lending two thousand dollars to Navy Jack, and finally it fell into his hands."

On August 10, 1891 the District Municipality of North Vancouver was incorporated and in 1893 J.C. Keith was elected as the Reeve. The council permitted borrowing of \$40,000 at eight per cent interest for fifty years to build Lighthouse Road which became Keith Road when J.C. Keith had underwritten the loan at par but it was a massive project and construction had to be stopped and was not continued until 1902. (See Ramsey, 1986, pp30-31).

From the period of 1888 to 1891 there was rampant land speculation in B.C. with numerous crown lands sold for \$1 per acre. The Land Act of 1891 tried to reduce speculation and put restrictions on purchase. First class agricultural land was \$5 per acre, second class land was that which required irrigation and sold for \$2.50 per acre, and "Mountainous and rocky tracts wholly unfit for agricultural purpose" were classified as third class at \$1 per acre. In addition, no person could purchase any additional land until the first purchase had been occupied for two years and had made permanent improvements equal to the purchase price. J.C. Keith announced his intention to purchase Passage Island well before this act was passed. A notice appeared in the *British Columbia Gazette* of July 25, 1889:

LAND NOTICES	
Notice is hereby given that 60 days after date I intend making application to the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works for permission to purchase the following described lands in New Westminster District:	
1. Commencing at a point on the shore line at the west entrance of the bay lying to the west of Halkett Point, Gambier Island; thence north 80 chains; thence east to the shore line of Gambier Island; thence southerly following the shore line to point of commencement; containing 320 acres, more or less:	
2. Passage Island, at the entrance of Howe Sound, containing 30 acres, more or less.	
	J.C. Keith
Vancouver, B.C.	
July 22nd, 1889	jy25

The land registration for Passage Island showed an entry date of September 18, 1889 for 32 acres at \$1.00 per acre (An original price of \$2.50 per acre had been crossed out and replaced by the \$1.00 price). He made a down payment of \$7.50 in 1889 and the remaining \$24.50 in December 1890. The record shows that it was "Gazetted" on November 5, 1890 and a final entry date of April 27, 1891.

Keith was lucky that he had posted his notice early in the *Gazette* as a later notice on July 30, 1890 reported:



RESPECTING THE SALE OF CROWN LANDS

Notice is hereby given that, pursuant to an Order in Council, approved by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor on the 30th July, instant, the alienation of any and all Crown lands by private sale will be discontinued from and after this date until further notice, pending contemplated legislation.

This notice shall not affect or prevent the right to complete the purchase or sale of any lands in respect of which notices of intention to make application to purchase have been published in the British Columbia Gazette prior to the first day of August next.

F.G. Vernon  
Chief Commissioner of Lands & Works

Meanwhile Keith was proceeding on the Passage Island purchase and the November 13, 1890 *Gazette* reported:

NEW WESTMINSTER DISTRICT

Notice is hereby given that the under-mentioned tracts of land, situate in New Westminster District, have been surveyed, and that plans of the same can be seen at the Lands and Works Department, Victoria, and at the office of Chas. Warwick, Esq., Assistant Commissioner, New Westminster:-

Lot 836, Group 1. - J. Keith, application to purchase by Gazette notice dated 22nd July, 1889.

Lot 841, Group 1. - J.C. Keith, application to purchase dated 18th September, 1889.

W.S. Gore  
Surveyor-General

It did not take long for the government to tax Passage Island. The following appeared in the *Gazette* in January of 1891:

TAX NOTICES:

NEW WESTMINSTER AND NEW WESTMINSTER CITY AND VANCOUVER DISTRICTS.

Notice is hereby given that Assessed and Provincial Revenue Taxes for the year 1891 are now due and payable at my office, Odd Fellows Block, Lorne Street, New Westminster, at the following rates:

If paid on or before 30th June: - one-half of 1 per cent on the assessed value of real property, one-third of one percent on the assessed value of personal property, one-half of one percent on the income of every person of \$1,500 or over, 7.5 cents per acre on wild land.

So, J.C. Keith became the first of the Passage Island owners to pay taxes and receive no local services. Assuming that the island was considered wild land, he would have had to pay \$2.40 in taxes in 1891. However, if the assessed value were only \$32 he might have had to pay only 16 cents in taxes. Tax rates today are similar except that

assessed values are much higher so the total taxes paid by Passage Island each year are about \$40,000. The services received are about the same as in 1891.

After the 1891 Land Act had been passed another notice appeared:

<p style="text-align: center;">NOTICE RESPECTING THE SALE OF CROWN LANDS</p> <p>Notice is hereby given that the Order in Council, which was approved by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor on 30th July, 1890, providing that the alienation of Crown lands by private sale be discontinued, notice of which was published in the British Columbia Gazette and dated 31st July, 1890, has been rescinded, and that thirty (30) days after the date of this notice vacant unreserved Crown lands will be open to sale under the provisions of the "Land Act"</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F.G. Vernon Chief Commissioner of Lands &amp; Works</p>
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A further search of the *Gazette* shows that J.C. Keith purchased some other lands in B.C. in 1891 and his wife purchased another property in 1892. These would have been subject to conditions in the Land Act. The February 18th 1892 *Gazette* reports:

<p style="text-align: center;">LAND NOTICES</p> <p>Notice is hereby given that 60 days after date I intend making application to the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works to purchase the following described land, situate in Group One, New Westminster District, viz:</p> <p>Commencing at a post marked "A.J.K.," 20 chains north of John Lewerk's south-east corner post, on Capilano Creek; thence east 40 chains; thence north 80 chains; thence west 40 chains, thence south 80 chains to place of beginning, and containing 320 acres, more or less.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">A.J. Keith Vancouver, Feb 13th, 1892</p>
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The Vancouver archives contains two excellent and detailed 1891 photographs of Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Keith and friends sitting on the west bay of Passage Island. The caption of the picture was written by Major J.S. Matthews with the following description for the top photo which shows a group of 18 people sitting on the rocks:

"Passage Island, named by Capt. Vancouver; owned by Mrs. J.C.Keith, Aug. 1891. R. to L:- J.C.Keith in grey; E.E. Rand, lighting pipe; J.D. Townley, hand to hat, B.T. Rogers, with gun; Miss Rose Townley (Mrs. Grange Holt) behind child (white hat)"

Since there had to be a photographer, this means at least 19 people were in the landing party. The bottom photo shows 9 people in

two long canoes. Some of the people are on the shore. This photo has the caption:

"Passage Island, named by Capt. Vancouver; owned by Mrs. J.C. Keith, J.C.Keith, sitting, whiskers, grey suit; E.E. Rand, standing; Miss Rose Townley(third from left) now Mrs. Grange Holt. Aug. 1891. JSM.

These were the typewritten captions on the photos but close examination shows other writing around the edges. In decorative script which might be the photographer or just the album it says: W.M. Tegart, Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. There is small handwriting around the edge of the photo which looks like the same handwriting of other photos in the Matthews collection. This reads:

"Too much time has been spent in an endeavor to locate exact spot-later an easier way may reveal it. It may not be Passage Island. It may be on the Pt Atkinson shore or near Horseshoe Bay."

In fact, the photograph is of the West Bay of Passage Island and it looks similar today. Major Matthews confusion was probably because he thought it was South Bay since he later wrote that it was the same bay (South Bay) where John Thompson, the Passage Island hermit of the 1930's lives.

It is interesting to trace the other members of the landing party besides Mr. and Mrs. Keith. The only names given were E.E. Rand, J.D. Townley, Miss Rose Townley (Mrs. Grange Holt) and B.T. Rogers. Who were these people? They were also prominent in Vancouver Society. From Volume I of Matthews, "Early Vancouver", p. 101 we learn that E.E. Rand was a well known cricketer in 1888 but made more money finding British investors to invest in Vancouver. J.D. Townley's name appears in issues of the British Columbia Gazette as another land purchaser and obtained extensive water rights for 99 years around the town of Nelson, B.C.. The Townleys may have been related to Lt. Colonel T.O. Townley who became Mayor of Vancouver in 1901. The November 7, 1890 *Gazette* reports:

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given of my intention to apply to the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works for authority to take one thousand inches of water from Cottonwood Smith Creek, near Nelson, in West Kootenay District: - Commencing at a point where the said Cottonwood Smith Creek first enters my preemption, or at any point where it flows though or at its exit from my pre-emption, to any portion of the said town of Nelson where water will be required for milling, manufacturing and household purposes, for a term of ninety-nine years.

J.D. Townley

Dated at Nelson, October 22nd, 1890

The January 3, 1891 *Gazette* also reported:

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given of my intention to apply to the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works for authority to take 300 inches of water from a spring of water now flowing in three branches through my pre-emption near Nelson, in West Kootenay District, at any point from its source or throughout my pre-emption, to be conveyed across the land reserved by the Government and my pre-emption, to any portion of my said pre-emption or the Town of Nelson where water will be required for irrigation, manufacturing, milling and household purposes, for a term of ninety-nine years.

J.D. Townley  
Nelson, October 22nd, 1890

B.T. Rogers became the wealthiest of all those in the photograph. He avoided speculative investments but developed the B.C. Sugar Refinery in 1892 by making a deal with the City Council to get fifteen years without taxes and ten years worth of free water. In exchange he promised to only employ white labour. For his home, he built "Gabriola" which is now known as "The Mansion" on Davie Street a landmark restaurant. He was also known for driving fast sports cars "in excess of forty miles an hour" and received several speeding fines. In 1900, he was the driver in the first accident in Vancouver in which a person was hit by a car. The victim, a young boy, was more excited about the ride he got in the car after the accident. Rogers died a millionaire in 1918 with Net assets of \$1,238,168. His wife, Mary, continued as a society matron in Vancouver until she died in 1965 at the age of 96.

In those days, steamships would often leave Vancouver to cruise around Howe Sound. The Vancouver City Archives contains an old four page pamphlet describing the sights on one trip which includes several references to Keith:

The Alhambra Senator Stag Party Picnic to Anvil Island on Sunday, July 22nd 1894 by Steamer "Comor". Meals and Refreshments will be supplied on board. Under the Management of Captain Stalker and S. Thompson of Alhambra Hotel, Tickets 50 c.

...Rounding the Lighthouse the Queen Charlotte Passage of Howe Sound is entered, Passage Island, belonging to Mr. Keith, being midway between Point Atkinson and Bowen Island

..On the same shore a mile further is Eagle Harbor, the terminus of the Keith Road of North Vancouver...

...On the opposite shore of Bowen Island is Snug Cove..A little further is Hood Point, where Mr. Keith has a nice place"

Keith had bought the Hood Point Hotel on Bowen Island as a summer home after it had failed in 1911, they called it "Invercraig". He also started to develop adjacent property for tennis courts, a bridal path, and a golf course. The property reverted back to the crown when he died in 1914 but his wife later bought it at a tax sale and sold all the Hood Point property in 1924 to Captain Cates.

Although J.C. Keith was a prominent member of Vancouver society he was not successful in all of his activities. Robert McDonald in his book, *Making Vancouver* has a good description of these:

"Speculative fervour affected even bankers. Essentially a promoter rather than a conservative banker, the Scottish-born manager of the Bank of British Columbia, J.C. Keith, went beyond the already generous guidelines set down by the bank's British head office and made loans secured only by real estate at highly inflated prices. For his defiance of company policy the bank dismissed Keith in 1892"(p.42)

"J.C. Keith had always been a speculative investor, having been fired in 1892 from his job as Vancouver manager of the Bank of British Columbia for improperly lending money secured only by real estate. but his business practices seemed to pay off. At his death in 1914 he left wealth estimated initially at \$580,700, the only real estate entrepreneur to place among the business community's twenty top wealth leavers. When the estate's real worth was finally determined some thirteen years later, however, debts of almost \$1 million remained. Keith's business empire, inflated by exaggerated land values and heavy mortgaging, paid creditors no more than two cents on the dollar" (p.131)

J.C. Keith died from pleurisy on October 6, 1914 at the age of 62. At that time he was living at 1130 Georgia Street. When his estate was finally settled records showed that he owed \$298,629.33 to his wife and \$1500 to T.O. Townley as well as many others. However, there was no mention of Passage Island in his extensive list of land holdings when the probate records were recorded. The reason was that at the time of his death the property was owned by his wife, Anne Jane Keith!

For unknown reasons J.C. Keith had sold Passage Island to Sarah Finlayson of Victoria, his wife's mother, on September 26, 1894 for an unknown price. Then, on June 1, 1904 she sold it to her daughter Anne for \$160 returning it to the Keith family.

His wife Anne J. Keith lived on in Vancouver until she died on November 18, 1937 at the age of 81. She owned the island much longer than her husband. Her ownership was noted in the 1891 photograph and in a March 30, 1937 interview by Major Matthews with her daughter Mary Isabella Keith in which she said: "Passage Island was owned by my mother".

Anne Keith was born in the Fort Victoria bastion when Vancouver Island was still a crown colony. Her father, the Hon. Roderick Finlayson was prominent in the history of B.C. and was the Chief Factor of the Hudson Bay Company in Victoria (then named Fort Camosun), and the right-hand man of Sir James Douglas the Governor.

She was mentioned several times in Major Matthews volumes. Volume I, page 49 has a discussion of an 1890 photograph of the West End with the description:

"The tree on the far side of False Creek, the tall fir or hemlock, is at the foot of Broughton Street, just in front of Mrs. J.C. Keith's garden, which runs down to the water."

When she died she was living at 1400 Beach avenue with her daughter, Mary. When the estate was probated it had a net value of \$71,788.54 with Passage Island listed with a 1937 assessed value of \$325. She also still owned the land on Gambier Island that was originally purchased by J. C. Keith at the same time as Passage Island.

Mary Isabella Keith inherited Passage Island from her mother and held it until her own death in November 1958 when she was living at 1243 Thurlow (an address not as distinguished as 1400 Beach Avenue). She was born in 1888 in Victoria. On Mar 30th 1937, she wrote: "Passage Island was owned by my mother". On Nov. 2, 1942 she went to the city archives and met with Major Matthews. She told how her father also owned the "Hood Point Hotel" at Hood Point, Bowen Island and also owned "Dollarton".

After the death of Mary Isabella Keith in 1958, Passage Island was sold by the estate at auction in 1959 after it had been in the Keith family for 69 years. The assessed value at the time was \$2250. However, the company E.E. Rand & Fowler Limited put a fair market value of \$3200 on the property. Note that E.E. Rand was in the old 1891 photograph. The description of the island in the estate included the note:

"This is a very small island lying between Point Atkinson and Bowen Island. There is no fresh water on it and no improvements. It is in an exposed location and there is no anchorage for pleasure craft."
--

The Will of Mary Isabella Keith dictated the sale of most of her property with the proceeds to be distributed among her cousins.

#### **IV. The Auction:**

A notice appeared in the *British Columbia Gazette* of January 29th 1959.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS  
Mary Isabella Keith, Deceased

Notice is hereby given that creditors and others having claims against the estate of Mary Isabella Keith, deceased, formerly of 1400 Beach Avenue and laterly of 1243 Thurlow street, Vancouver B.C. are hereby required to send them to the undersigned executors, at 1403, 1030 West Georgia Street, Vancouver 5, B.C. before the 20th day of March, 1959, after which date the executors will proceed to distribute the said estate amongst the parties entitled thereto =, have regard only to the claims of which they then have notice.

E.M.C McLorg  
S.G. Cox  
Executors  
Davis & Co.  
Solicitors

By 1959, the estate of Mary Isabella Keith was settled and Passage Island was put up for public auction. This was big news and reported often in the Vancouver newspapers. The *Vancouver Sun* reported on the front page on June 24 that there would be an auction on July 15 by sealed bid and that the B.C. Recreation Minister was considering turning Passage Island into a public park.

Park Plan For Island In Sound:  
Passage Is. Under Study By Westwood

Recreation Minister Earle Westwood is considering turning Passage Island into a public park.

He ordered his park department today to "look into" the purchase of the 32-acre island three miles off Fisherman's Cove, West Vancouver.

The minister acted after receiving a telegram from the West Vancouver Parks and Recreation Commission, suggesting the island be bought by the government for us as a marine park.

Said Williston" "It is just the kind of thing we are always on the lookout for."

He said such property was rapidly disappearing from public use. The island is being advertised by a Vancouver firm of solicitors to settle the estate of the late Mary Isabella Keith. The advertisements say the island is on the market for the first time in 68 years.

Bill Ellis, a member of the commission, said there were 40,000 small boat owners in the lower mainland but there were few places along Howe Sound that are not private property.

Ellis said the cost of turning the island into "a very lovely park" would be "relatively inexpensive".

The advertisements say sealed cash offers for the island have to be submitted to the solicitors by July 15.

The *Vancouver Province* also reported the story on June 26:

#### Public park suggested for island

Passage Island, the rocky 32-acre islet near the mouth of Howe Sound, three miles off Fisherman's Cove may become a public park.

In response to a telegram from West Vancouver parks and recreation commission suggesting that the provincial government acquire the island, Recreations Minister Earle Westwood has ordered his department to look into the possibility of purchase.

The island was acquired 68 years ago by the late J.C. Keith, pioneer of the North shore. It has recently been put on the market by the estate of his daughter, the late Mary Isabella Keith.

#### BIDS BY JULY 15

The parks commission suggested to the minister that the island would make an ideal site for a marine park. It has a small beach and is easy of access.

Mr. Westwood said: "It is just the kind of thing we are always on the lookout for."

Solicitors for the estate have asked for sealed cash offers to be submitted by July 15.

#### PRIVATELY OWNED

"The west side of the sound is now nearly all privately owned," he said.

"If a wharf is built at Passage Island it will be a popular picnic spot for the 40,000 small boat owners in the Vancouver area."

An editorial in the *Vancouver Sun* on June 26 argued strongly that "Saving 'Passage' Worth All Speed".

#### Saving 'Passage' Worth All Speed

Recreations Minister Earle Westwood should throw the throttle wide open to save Passage Island as a public marine park.

All speed is justified to make this ideal spot lying at the entrance to Howe Sound, a day picnicking Mecca for owners of smaller pleasure boats. Those who know the location say it can be done with relatively little expense over the cost of buying the island from a private estate.

Mr. Westwood's quick promise to have officials of his department look into the possibility of buying Passage, as suggested by West Vancouver parks and recreation commission, is highly encouraging. But the minister must keep in sight the July 15 deadline set for bids to buy the island.



Passage would be an ideal addition to the small but growing chain of marine parks which the provincial government is developing.

These day or overnight stopping places for small boats are highly appropriate to B.C.'s marvelous coastal waters.

They're just as important as the chain of first class picnic and campsites being developed under Mr. Westwood's energetic direction along B.C.'s highways. It's an astonishing fact that with upward of 50,000 private pleasure boats operating in lower mainland waters, there's a boat to every half dozen private cards in B.C. Marine pleasure seekers have a lot more government facilities coming to them.

By the time of the auction the provincial government had decided against a park saying it was "too hazardous". After the auction the *Vancouver Province* reported on July 20, 1959:

#### MYSTERY MAN BUYS MARINE PARK SITE

Rockbound Passage Island has been rejected as a provincial marine park site and now belongs to a young Vancouver businessman.

The 32-acre islet lying at the entrance to Howe Sound three miles off Fishermen's Cove was sold by executors for the will of the late Mary Isabella Keith whose family owned it for 69 years.

The provincial minister of recreation and conservation turned it down as "too hazardous" for a recreational area but a citizen who wishes to remain anonymous bought it July 16 for a sum reported in excess of \$7,000.

"Our engineers investigated Passage Island very carefully and reported against acquiring it because although it is 32 acres in size, only two acres are suitable for development. It has accommodation for only five boats and the length of the island is rimmed with precipitous cliffs from five to fifteen feet high" said recreation minister Earle Westwood.

Only 12 private individuals submitted bids for the tree-dotted piece of land, said E.M. C. McLorg, executor with S.G. Cox.

Lowest offer was \$100.

Mr. McLorg said the new owner asked that neither his name nor the price be revealed.

Mr. Westwood's department was alerted about the sale by West Vancouver parks board officials who urged the government to purchase the island for use as a marine park.

The next day the sale was also reported in a similar article in The *Victoria Colonist*:

Passage Island Sold: Marine Park Out, 'Too Hazardous'

VANCOUVER (CP) - Rockbound Passage Island has been rejected as a provincial marine park site and now belongs to a young Vancouver businessman.

The 32-acre island at the entrance to Howe Sound was sold by executors for the will of the late Mary Isabella Keith, whose family owned it for 69 years.

Earle Westwood, minister of recreation and conservation, turned it down as "too hazardous" for a provincial recreation area. A spokesman for the executors said somebody who wishes to remain anonymous bought it July 16 for between \$7,000 and \$10,000.

Only 12 private individuals submitted bids for the tree-dotted piece of land, said executor E. M. C. McLorg. The lowest offer was \$100.

In actual fact, the sale of the island was not to a "Mystery Man" but instead to two Vancouver women: Hazel Doris Leake and Mary Elfrieda Clarissa Knowles and when they registered the property they were listed as the wives of James Leake of 2482 Oliver Crescent and Robert Alan Knowles of 6069 Holland Street in Vancouver. It was transferred from the Keith estate to Mrs. Leake and Mrs. Knowles in September 1959. A 1963 Registration listed a market value of \$30,000. On November 18, 1963 Robert Alan Knowles bought the property from the two women for a price of "One Dollar and other valuable consideration". On December 2, 1963 Robert Knowles obtained a mortgage of \$15,000 on the property from Burrard Mortgage Investments Ltd. The mortgage was paid off on September 14, 1965.

The fact that the island had owners had not stopped the hermit and not stopped the many people who used to row or sail over to the island to picnic and party in those early years. George Bowering, a well known B.C. author and poet wrote briefly of Passage Island in his "Alphabiography" published in 1994 (p. 316).

"Visitors and the local public-relations people often remark on Vancouver's natural beauty. But the longer people have lived here, the less natural beauty there is. Real-estate monsters litter subdivisions higher up the mountains, and where the trees used to be, the rain-beaten earth slides downhill. In 1960 my girlfriend and I ran a boat to Passage Island and found the beach covered with condoms. I wondered how many sexually agitated people could have made it to that generally empty spot. She instructed me regarding toilets and sewers and ocean tides."

Bowering has informed me that he drove her father's 14-foot inboard boat with little or no experience as a boat driver while his girl friend water-skied to Passage Island. They almost had a bad accident

when he got the gears mixed up and she was sitting on the bow and he had to turn hard to miss the rocks. She managed to hang on...

## **VI. Development of the Island**

In 1964, a man named Bob Knowles (who turned out to be the 1959 Mystery Man) called up Phil Matty who was in the Industrial Real Estate business and said he needed to rent a 1000 foot warehouse. Phil said he could find something but then Knowles said that he only needed it for a week, Phil said that would be hard and asked what he needed it for. Knowles replied that he was a logger and was balloon logging in North Vancouver had needed to dry out the balloon. Phil said he should call the fire departments around to see who had a place to lay it out rather than renting a warehouse.

Soon after, Knowles called Phil again and said that plan worked and he would like to discuss a real estate deal. He said he owned Passage Island and would like to have Phil sell it. Phil said it would be difficult but he made up a brochure and tried commercial customers with no luck and then sent it to girl guides, boy scouts, and the B.C. Recreation Minister Westwood looking for a buyer. Westwood said they had researched the island once and it was too dangerous. Nobody was interested except the Girl Guides thought it was a nice place but were afraid of boys rowing over.

After not having any luck, Phil told Knowles that the only way was to divide it up as recreational lots and sell them for \$3000 each. Knowles told Phil to try that and then told Phil that he had a partner Mr. Lee, who agreed that if Phil would do all the work and get zoning, permits, and selling etc., they would give Phil one third ownership of the project. Phil agreed and attempted to market it.

At one point, Knowles asked a neighbour, UBC Professor Sinclair Healy and his wife Rachael to see if other UBC faculty might be interested in buying lots on the island. Healy told his colleagues Dorothy Rizer and Vera Mackay and they eventually bought lots. However, Healy was off on sabbatical to England and had other things to think about. Thirty years later, in 1998, Healy still regretted that he had not bought a lot.

Knowles used to repeatedly call Phil to see how things were going and got to the point where Phil was getting tired of him. One day they met and Phil said that in 30 minutes one of them would own the whole thing. they agreed that they would both write down a price, and they both wrote down \$60,000 so Phil agreed. When Phil handed over a check Knowles was quite happy looking like he had made a very

good deal (as the original auction price in 1959 was \$10,000 or less). Phil thought it was also a good deal since he had been building houses in Belize and had figured out the water catchment system.

A new corporation, Passage Island Estates, Ltd. was created in April of 1965 and reported in the *British Columbia Gazette* of April 15, 1965:

<p>Companies Act: No. 64079</p> <p>Notice is hereby given that "Passage Island Estates Ltd." was incorporated under the Companies Act on the 5th day of April, 1965.</p> <p>The Company is authorized to issue ten thousand shares without nominal or par value.</p> <p>The address of its registered office is 818, 470 Granville Street, Vancouver, B.C.</p> <p>The objects for which the Company is established are:</p> <p>(a) to make enquiries and to investigate for and to discover undeveloped lands in and about the Province of British Columbia, and, in particular, in the islands of the Gulf of Georgia;</p> <p>(b) To obtain, survey, improve, clear, develop, and subdivide such lands for resale, and particularly that island known as Passage Island.</p> <p>A.H. Hall Registrar of Companies</p>
---

The *Vancouver Province* reported the new development on May 6, 1965:

<p>Island in Howe Sound Subdivided For Homes</p> <p>Passage Island at the mouth of Howe Sound, a 32-acre rock that sold for \$32 in 1893, is expected to sell for \$200,000 now in small pieces.</p> <p>Matty Estates Ltd., a real estate company, acquired the waterless, wooded island for an undisclosed price and will divide it into 62 building lots that will be tagged at about \$3,300.</p> <p>Phil Matty says the lots will be offered as sites for holiday homes. Each would have some water frontage and would be not less than 15,000 square feet, he said.</p> <p>He says the records show it was first acquired 72 years ago by a man named Keith, believed to have been the builder of the north shore road of that name.</p> <p>Mr. Matty said the company would not install services so that the price of lots could be held to the level proposed.</p> <p>On the water problem, he says the residents do what 80 per cent of the people in the world do - catch rainfall and store it in a cistern for the dry season.</p>
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He said the island has no good anchorage but has several pebble beaches that would be available to all by means of public access provided in the plan.

On June 3, 1965 the land was officially sold by Robert Knowles to Passage Island Estates Ltd. for "One DOLLAR and other valuable consideration". The market value was listed on the registration as \$30,000.

Part of the deal with Knowles was that Phil would finance it by selling some of the lots and if full payment were not made by a certain date then a small amount of money would be owed later. A couple years later Knowles called up Phil, who was on the island at the time, by marine radiophone and reminded Phil that he still owed money. This was after Knowles had seen Phil's ads selling lots on the island. Phil reminded him that the money was to be applied towards future real estate dealings and Knowles said that it did not look like there would be any more deals.

## **VII. The first sales**

The island development plan was registered by a new company owned by Phil Matty, Passage Island Estates Ltd., in the New Westminster Land District as District Lot 841, Plan 12053 and approved on August 3, 1965. This plan is available in the New Westminster Land Title Office. The notation on the plan included:

Deposited in the Land Registry Office at Vancouver. B.C. on the 6th day of August, 1965.

Passage Island Estates, Ltd.  
Phil Matty, Secretary/ Director/Owner

Burrard Mortgage Investments, Ltd.

Approved under the Land Registry Act on the 3rd day of August, 1965  
Acting Assistant Chief Engineer, Department of Highways      Approving Officer

I, J.E. Hermon of the City of Vancouver, a British Columbia Land Surveyor, make oath and say that I was present at and did personally superintend the survey represented by this plan and that the survey and plan are correct. The said survey was completed on the 26th day of July, 1965

HERMON and COTTON  
Dominion Land Surveyors  
1161 Melville Street  
Vancouver, B.C.

LEGEND:

Bearings are astronomic and derived from solar observations.

Iron Posts set shown thus: IP      ● (solid circle)

Lead Plugs set shown thus: LP      ■ (solid square)

Wood Posts set shown thus: -○- (empty circle with 4 lines)

Traverse Hubs set shown thus:      -○- (empty circle with 2 lines)

There were 11 covenants registered for the island which are still in effect today and have largely served the purpose to regulate development on the island.

THE PURCHASER COVENANTS that he will not:-

1. Erect or cause to be erected on the said lands any building save one(1) single-family dwelling plus a boat house.

(i) the net value (excluding the value of the land and boat house) shall be at least \$5,000.00. The Vendor reserves the right to refer the question of cost of improvements for the opinion of a member of the Canadian Institute of Quantity Surveyors whose decision shall be binding and final and

(ii) of which the floor area (excluding that of the boat house) shall be not less than Seven Hundred and Fifty (750) square feet. Such area shall be measured in relation to the ground floor plan and the area of a second storey shall not be included for the purpose of determining such a minimum area.

2. Use the private dwelling to be erected on the said lands for any purpose other than that of a single-dwelling private house and shall not do or suffer upon the said land or part thereof or in or upon any building to be erected thereon anything which shall be deemed a nuisance to the person or persons for the time being owning or occupying any of the lots contained within the said building estate.

3. Suffer or allow the said lands or the building thereon to deteriorate.

4. Carry on or permit to be carried on upon the said lands or in any building erected thereon any trade of business whatsoever.

5. Erect or construct on the said lands any residence, building, fence or other improvement of any addition thereto, or alteration thereof unless and until the proposal to erect such building or fence, or make such improvement, addition or alteration, and proper plans, elevations and specifications thereof (setting forth all materials to be used with details of their qualities and quantities) shall have been first submitted to and approved in writing by the Vendor which shall have the right and power to approve or reject the same. No building shall, without the consent in writing of the Vendor, be erected on the said lands closer to the street or road on which the

said lands fronts than thirty feet (30') nor closer to a boundary between the said lands and any other lot in the said subdivision than ten feet (10').

6. Allow water from or in any stress, culvert, ditch, pond or collection of water to be diverted or drained; nor shall any culvert, ditch, stream or waterflow be interfered with or changed without the written consent of the Vendor.

7. Erect or display any billboards, placards, advertising or signs of any kind on the said land or any part thereof or on any residence or building or on or in any window or door of any residence of building erected thereon. Provided that the foregoing shall not prevent the display of notices of a reasonable size advertising that the premises are for sale or for rent.

8. Cut down any tree presently growing on the said lands which shall be either more than 15 feet high or 4 inches in diameter of the trunk measured at a height of 3 feet from the ground with the consent in writing of the Vendor. Provided further that the Purchaser shall be entitled, if in his opinion any tree is dangerous to person or property, to sever and remove not more than the top one-third of the height of such tree.

9. Erect any fence more than 3 feet high or plant or permit to grow, any hedge over 3 feet high and will not erect, plant or permit to grow any fence or hedge which is unsightly.

10. Construct or permit to be constructed or used on the said lands any wharf, boathouse, breakwater, groyne or mooring except with the consent in writing of the Vendor first had and obtained.

11. Allow any septic tank, cesspool, sewer or system of drainage to become a nuisance or the source of any offensive smell or a breeding place of mosquitoes or flies.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the parties hereto have executed these presents the day and year first above written.

SEALED with the seal of )  
PASSAGE ISLAND ESTATES LTD. )  
and signed by: )

\_\_\_\_\_) )  
Director )

\_\_\_\_\_) )  
Secretary )

SIGNED, SEALED and DELIVERED )  
in the presence of: )

\_\_\_\_\_) )  
\_\_\_\_\_ )

The first sale was Lot 33 to UBC Professor Dorothy Rizer in 1965. At the beginning lots were selling in the \$3000-4000 range. Dorothy had bought her house off the plan without seeing the lot. She expected to park her boat right next to her house on the west beach.

## VIII. The Great Fire of 1967

In August 1967 Phil Matty was in his downtown office and someone on Eagle Harbor called him and said Passage Island was on fire. Phil could see the island from the west end and saw the smoke. At that time Phil was the Fire Warden for Passage Island so he immediately knew what to do and called the forest service and they sent out the water bomber.

Phil then picked up his son, Craig, and his son's friend and drove out to Fisherman's Cove and got in the boat and came over to the island. The water bomber was there and a helicopter. The bomber had come down and scooped up water near Bowen Island. The helicopter signaled down that they should get out of the way. Phil was worried about the kids and got them out and then the bomber dumped water and quickly put out the fire. It had apparently started when some campers near Dorothy Rizer's Lot 33 on the west beach had left a smoldering fire and the winds blew in and started burning.

The fire was reported in the *Vancouver Province* on August 24, 1967:

### Water Bomber Shows Its Stuff

A Canso water bomber displayed the latest in fire fighting techniques to thousands of Vancouver residents Wednesday afternoon when it doused a bush fire on Passage Island at the mouth of Howe Sound

The fire is believed to have flared up from a fisherman's campfire that could have been smoldering from the fishing derby last Sunday

The aerial attack was also watched by hundreds of motorists and tourists who crowded vantage points along the Upper Levels Highway in West Vancouver.

"It wasn't much of a fire but at least it gives an example of how we use our water bombers." said fire prevention officer D.H. Owen.

Following the bombing, a boat load of firefighters was sent to the island to kill any embers.

Passage Island, once known as Snake Island, was the scene of three house fires in the early 1940s when it was occupied by John Thompson, 80, a recluse. After Thompson's third driftwood shack burned he was taken to Vancouver and cared for by the Salvation Army until he died.

The 32-acre island, 1.5 miles west of Point Atkinson, is now being subdivided for summer homes.

**Beginning in 1968 the Modern Era began on Passage Island when the first home was built.**



## **PASSAGE ISLAND**

### **John Thompson: The Hermit of Passage Island**

*"There always has to be a beginning...and from there we can build, and it's fun."  
...John Thompson*

No history of Passage Island would be complete without the story of John Thompson, the "Passage Island Hermit" and the first permanent resident. Thompson was legendary and was written up in newspapers as far east as Montreal and appeared many times in the Vancouver newspapers. In the 1940's many people had visited the hermit and several have been located and interviewed by the author including Tony Scott, a UBC Economics Professor; Ross Carter, a Bowen Island Historian, and Cal Frost, another Bowen Island Historian. Unity Bainbridge, a famous B.C. Artist painted the portrait of John Thompson in 1940 on Passage Island. The painting is titled "The Old Hermit of Passage Island" and was sold.

Thompson's documented life can be split into five eras. In each case he started with great hope and ended the era in sadness which caused him to move on to a new start. There are many stories about the hermit but this is my best accounting of the facts, obtained from several sources. He was born in Als, Denmark on August 2, 1870 and the first era was his life in Denmark where he lived until he emigrated to Canada at the age of 18 during the massive immigration wave to North America with hope for a new life and prosperity. The second period of his life was when came to Canada and B.C. in 1888 at the age of 18, first to B.C. and then to the Yukon during the Klondike Gold Rush in the 1890's. The third period in which we have any information was the 1930's when he was a squatter on the Kitsilano Indian Reserve. The fourth period was the eight years he spent on Passage Island from 1937-1944. The fifth and final era of his life ended in 1949 when he died after spending several years committed to Esmondale Mental Hospital yet his burial certificate listed his home as "Passage Island". Even after his death his peaceful rest was disrupted as his gravesite was involved in an incident involving controversial B.C. politician Bill Vanderzalm who later was forced to resign as Premier in an unrelated scandal.

### **The Gold Rush Days**

On June 22, 1899 he entered the Yukon along with many other gold miners during the Klondike Gold Rush. The North West Mounted

Police kept records of all miners entering the Yukon and his name appears with an address of Skagway, Alaska on that date traveling in Boat 319 or 320 to the Klondike fields. These were very small boats and the names of other occupants were John Anderson of San Francisco and Fred Bishop of Nelson B.C. It is likely that these three men were friends and worked together. Thompson was too late to become rich so he must have worked for others or for the railroad. During his time up there he lost his toes to frostbite. The name "John Thompson" also appears three times in archives found in Alaska libraries. The 1901 and 1903 directories of the Yukon and Alaska list John Thompson as a Miner with a residence in Rampart City, Alaska, a town on the Yukon river about 300 miles west of the Klondike discovery. On Feb. 9, 1923 a Divorce Notice of John Thompson vs. Ellen Thompson appeared in the Fairbanks Alaska Daily News-Miner. Since the name is common one cannot be sure which of these belong to the Passage Island hermit but these are the only references in the archives to any miner named John Thompson.

One *Passage Island Legend* is that he also worked as a Shipwright on one of Shackleton's ships to Antarctica in the early 1900's, however, I cannot find any evidence of this and it seems unlikely as he would have had to travel to either England or New Zealand to board the ship.

### **Squatting on the Kitsilano Indian Reserve**

During the 1930's he occasionally worked in the Jericho shipyards in Vancouver but lived as a squatter on the beach in the Kitsilano Indian Reserve which is now called Kits Point at the base of the Burrard Bridge. The Indians had been forced to sell the reserve to the city in 1932 to be used for the footings of the Burrard Bridge and a proposed Sports Stadium by Mayor Gerry McGeer which was never built. The arbitrators gave them \$44,988.58 and lawyers got \$28,854.50 of this amount. The Indians had left but squatters moved in and Thompson was one of them.

Life was difficult in the depression years of the 1930's and many areas around Vancouver were also the home for squatters. All of these were controversy and the newspapers continued to have articles about the efforts of the city to remove the squatters. Some residents had lived there for many years and communities had developed. Artist Unity Bainbridge painted a scene of the squatters on the Kitsilano reserve. In the far background of the painting one can see Passage Island. Thompson probably looked at the island many times and planned for the day of his departure and his next home.

The *Vancouver Province* published a long article on November 7, 1936 which mentioned one squatter that could have been John Thompson:

Life Shuffles Placidly Along With Music And Philosophy for Kitsilano Squatters  
by Ogden H. Hershaw

(First part of article not shown here)

The settlers of Bennettville or Bumtown as it is sometimes called do not believe in thumb twiddling judging from the huge stacks of firewood piled up and ready for shipment whenever one turns. Several trucks are in evidence and two cars, even.

'Dey don't bodder nobody," these people, They mind their own business and that of their next door neighbor, and get along. There are some three hundred of them in this city within the city, thirty families, the rest single men. No women are living alone here. More than a dozen nationalities are represented, but those of British and United States origin are in majority.

As we walk along in the glorious October sunshine and unexpected sound reaches my ear, music, and down here.

The sobbing strains of a Ukrainian folk song has mingled with the lazy smoke and the smell of beach. It floats out into the Sabbath peace. Gives it depth.

I head toward the cabin whence the music comes and as I mount the clean scrubbed steps Kreisler's "Liebesfreud" greets me.

In the neat kitchen I meet a jovial family of six. Russians. Of course there is tea on the table, and who can resist Russian hospitality? Particularly when one is treated to black bread and "borstch" (I hope I spelt it correctly.)

If I expected to find undernourished, ragged slum brats in this neck of the woods, I was sadly mistaken. The kiddies are suntanned and surprisingly well dressed. The play and romp and fight like the normal healthy children they are. My hostess thinks herself fortunate to live so far away from heavy traffic and street cars. The kids may roam at will without causing her any worry.

"Of course," she adds wistfully, "we would like to give them better surroundings, more of a home; but we do our best. Besides sun and sea and fresh air really is a lot to be thankful for too; isn't it mister?"

The Colony's grand old man and unofficial mayor is Tomsen the Dane, over six feet tall and well into his eighties. His residence is reminiscent of a wartime dugout, which does not prevent him from giving us a dignified reception. I offer him a smoke by way of introduction but no -

"I have not come to that yet. I am too young. Sure I am young. Do you not notice my green shirt? See that kid over there wearing green socks? Look around you to the hills and the forest, are they not green too? Green is the emblem of youth, created by sap and strength. Age does not matter. Take the great fir trees, some of them are hundreds of years old. But are they bent and withered? Don't they stand there tall and strong and erect, no matter how the storms roar at them? Of course, it is not only tall, healthy trees you find out there. You find tangled choking underbrush as well, and soggy layers of decay. No value, but they help make the complete picture.

"Just as in life. There we find things crawling along the dark bottom too, communism for instance. But the west is like the fir it rears, it takes no notice of the underbrush, it can not do it any harm. It grows; grows on through the years, on and

up, into the warm sun and the chili winds. It matures and gains more strength and sap. Our province is the west.

"Ah yes, my friend, this is indeed the land of youth and progress. The east, that is yesterday. The eastern provinces and Europe. They lag astern. But this province...

"Your Province too, your paper, It is the child of the west, of the fir tree. Old, yes; but full of sap and courage. The press-- what an appropriate term -- that is what you do; press on, ahead. Relentless at times, granted. But nevertheless irresistible. Is not the press made of paper? And is not the paper a product of the green trees?"

I sit there spellbound, eyes and ears and mouth wide open. This is philosophy. Tomsen the Dane stands there like the trees he talks about. Old, but erect and full of sap. A British Columbian.

Les Miserables? You are wrong, say the settlers of Kitsilano Reserve, the city within the city, where life snuffles along with music and philosophy and placid drama.

The physical description of Tomsen the Dane has him taller and older than John Thompson. However, it is still quite possible that this is the same man. It was common for Danes with the name Tomsen to anglicize it to Thompson. In fact, a search of B.C. Death records up to 1972 showed nobody with the spelling Tomsen. Later newspaper articles about John Thompson showed him to be a non-smoking philosopher and many articles had incorrect spelling of his name. There had been about 300 squatters on the Kitsilano reserve and this man could have been someone else but many parts of the interview sound like John Thompson.

In November, 1936, sixty-eight of eighty-seven squatters on the reserve petitioned the city council to obtain a five-month postponement of the eviction notice. The list of names has not yet been found but he was not one of four names of the organizing committee.

The repeated efforts of the city to remove the squatters slowly had an impact and the population decreased. The *Vancouver Sun* reported on April 1, 1937:

Squatters Are Going to Keep Their Promise  
By Alan Morley

Honest folk, these Kitsilano squatters; more honest than a good many more prosperous people, perhaps.

They believe a promise is a promise -- and they are going to keep theirs.

At least that is what they told me this morning, on the deadline for their eviction from the brave little shacks they have built on the Indian Reserve Beach, and I believe them. I talked to several of them, but two stand out in my mind.

One was a long thin gangling man in early middle age, with a rather pleasant face. His rusty, purplish-brown suit was by no means in the height of fashion, his cap was somewhat of an antique, and he was engaged in the exasperating task of coiling up a rusty cable.

## NO TROUBLE

But he had time to talk as he worked.

"No," he said, "there won't be any trouble down here when they come to put us off. In fact, some have gone already -- a married couple from that house there moved off yesterday, and the single man next them, too."

"You see, we said we would."

"Of course, it wasn't us that said it, but the women folks. They held a meeting last fall and said if we could stay all winter we would move off in the spring."

"The way I look at it is, a promise is a promise, and we gotta keep it."

"The rest of the people here? Oh yes -- they think so too, at least most of em. Matter o'fact, all the married people are waiting for is a chance to get places up-town; they get a house allowance from the relief, see?"

"Any organized trouble? No, you won't see that."

"There was a couple of agitators down this way a while ago, but we didn't like them. I guess they found that out -- they went away."

## MANY HAVE LEFT

"Many gone yet? Why, yes, bout 40 or so, three houses right here last month are torn down, and a couple over there. More along the beach the same."

During the summer months most squatters had left, including Thompson. His name was not on the eviction order discussed in the *Vancouver Sun* on August 12:

### Beach Squatters Ordered Evicted: 12 Must Leave City Foreshore Area

Summary eviction of twelve squatters from provincial foreshore property near Burrard Bridge was ordered by Judge Lennox in County Court today.

The application was made by A. H. J. Swenetsky, counsel for the minister of lands.

The squatters had been served with notice on July 19 to vacate within ten days or show cause why an order should not be made for their removal. Four dwellers wrote in the government agent of Mr. Swenetsky requesting time within which to remove their houseboats.

"The crown can give an extension or not, as it sees fit," remarked Judge Lennox. "The order is for their summary removal."

The squatters involved are Ernest Beard, W. Crooper, E. Neilsen, Joseph R. Martin, William Bamfield, C.E. Mott, Frank Vangasse, Harry Bruno, W. Robinson, H. Coatworth, Charles Turner and Mary Foran.

By August only a few squatters remained and the police started to evict them. On August 24, the *Vancouver Sun* showed photographs of the houses and the police evicting the squatters:

### Evicting the Kitsilano Squatters

Without any spectacular ejections, Provincial Police are gradually clearing squatters off the Kitsilano Indian Reserve, east of Burrard Bridge. Most of the 11 left await Wednesday's high tides before departing.

Among the typical scenes shown here are (top left) S. Coatsworth, who lives in one of three tiny shacks mounted on a large scow, accepting service of an eviction order by Constable William Smedley, Provincial policeman on the right. (top right) George Neilsen, son of Mr. and Mrs. E. Neilsen, who divided his attention between his favorite cat and the pleasant occupation of making friends with the policeman yesterday, as they formally evicted his father. Neilsen, however, was allowed to return to his floathouse until Wednesday's high tide. (bottom) Contrasting squatter's residences. The Hans Bruno house in the background has been occupied on this spot for 23 years. The shack in the foreground is a recent addition to the colony.

After several years of controversy in August 1937 the police finally evicted all the squatters. The *Vancouver Province* reported on September 7 that the abandoned homes were demolished:

### Start To Demolish Squatters' Homes: Wrecking Crews Busy At Kitsilano

Axe, saw and crowbar came into violent play this morning, when a gang of workmen from the provincial department of public works, started to demolish the first of the dilapidated abandoned shacks down there on the Kitsilano foreshore, the last of the old guard lying between the Burrard Bridge and the B.C.E.R. trestle.

Perched atop of an old scow, long since given over to rot, is the former residence of F. Coatsworth. That is being ripped down and piled into heaps; beside it is an old boat, hull upward, with a gaping hole yawning heavenward. That, too, will go the way of an old scrap.

A big bonfire has blazed all the afternoon, carefully watched by the workmen. A heap of ashes will mark the spot. Squatters who are still there watch the proceedings, knowing their homes must come next unless they can float out with the tide, or vacate.

The elaborate Sports Stadium was never built and it was years before the current Museum, Planetarium, and City Archives were constructed.

## The Passage Island Years

At the time of the bonfire Thompson was safely on his new home on Passage Island. He was a proud man and refused to go on relief so instead, he had a friend row him out to Passage Island in the summer and became the first permanent resident at the age of 67. He was optimistic and hoped to build a shack before winter. He had very little the first year, almost no water.

Laura Gray who wrote an article about him in 1940 for the *Montreal Family Herald and Weekly Star* had visited him three times.

His picture appeared in the Montreal paper with the caption "a hobo all my life". She described the first year:

#### PASSAGE ISLAND HERMIT

"He had built himself a hovel at the edge of the tide and was furnishing it with 'gifts from the sea'. A mattress lay drying on the logs, soap, a candle end and a battered tin basin lay on another log. A boat with a hole in the prow was drawn up in dry dock for repairs- all gifts, he explained"

She asked what he would do for water and what we was going to live on. He replied:

"What I need will be sent". (pointing to the things he had beachcombed).

"I have some (water) already, not much, but enough," (pointing to a drip from above which had almost filled a rusty tin can.

"I am going to grow vegetables, fruit, everything"

"I hope to build a house before winter"

The following summer she returned to the island and found:

"...a sturdy, one-roomed house up, and even summer visitors - a young woman and three children - installed. An extension with a few sleeping shelves had been put up to accommodate"

She asked how he survived the year.

"I rowed to the mainland several times for water - I haven't a good enough supply yet. Next winter there will be plenty...See, potatoes, beans. Soon I shall have all I want."

She visited again in his third year:

"Hale, hearty, triumphant..eagerly he told of his experiences. His friends were there again -- for the holiday. ..A motor drew up, and a young man asked for water. 'Certainly, help yourselves from the well,'..one of three wells..There was a fine path of quite vigorous potatoes, rows of celery, one precious head of lettuce, blackberries already ripening, pumpkin vines, sunflowers,,,seedling cherry trees and apricots...A home made wheelbarrow. Wheels were slices off a log with tin nailed on the edges for tires...'Some day we will have everything. I hope to have water melons and cantaloupes next'...With great pride he showed us his washing machine- a wonderful rocker affair with corrugated tin to rub clothes clean.

Under trees was a stove built of stones with a sheet of tin for the top. A table and two wooden cupboards stood near, and a high wooden wall sheltered the out-door kitchen from the wind. When it rained there was the shack and a real stove a friend had given.

'There always has to be a beginning', he smiled as we walked back to our boat, 'and from there we can build, and it's fun'."



"A hobo all my life."

Also in 1940, Roma Carter a reporter for the *Vancouver Province* wrote of her visit to Thompson:

NO MYSTERY ABOUT PASSAGE ISLAND: HERMIT WHO LIVES ON LITTLE HOWE  
SOUND ISLE IS NO RECLUSE, BUT JUST KINDLY MAN WHO FLED THE  
DEPRESSION

Standing at the entrance to Howe Sound, with the glowing lighthouse of Point Atkinson on one side, and the green slopes of Bowen Island on the other, but quite bleak-looking itself, is little Passage Island.

Perhaps thousands of voyagers, on their way up the Sound have pondered the truth of the tales about a hermit who was supposed to live there.



On a crisp, cold evening in February, I had the opportunity to solve the mystery.

One of our neighbors, "The Skipper," had decided to satisfy his curiosity by a cruise over the island and invited use to accompany him.

The party was quite a merry one for The Skipper's three little sons were also present. But as we anchored off the rocky shore in bright moonlight, desolation was the most prominent feature. High cliffs cast dark, creepy shadows on the woods which fringed a stony beach. This landing space was fairly well lighted by the moonbeams.

Two of the boys and myself were put ashore first, while The Skipper went back to the launch for my sister and the other youngster.

I wasn't feeling very calm, even though his part of the shore was quite luminous, for I had only two little tots beside me with all those black, wavering shadows in the background. No wonder goose-bumps rose when one of the boys said he saw a man at the other end of the beach.

#### *Indistinct Figure of Man On Lonely Beach*

I, too, saw the indistinct form of a figure moving towards the water's edge. Having reached this objective he started shouting and waving his arms. This sudden activity frightened me. Perhaps we had been too bold, intruding on a hermit's privacy. Maybe he was angry at us for pushing in where we had no right to be, and was telling us to go away.

I was glad to see The Skipper return with the dinghy.

We trooped up the beach, heading for the person at the far end, and my fears were soon allayed. The hermit proved to be a kind and quite lovable character. The shouting, incoherent owing to the roar of the waves, had been merely to tell us of a cleared landing space a short distance from where we had disembarked.

We introduced ourselves and learned that our host's name was Thompson. Host indeed he turned out to be, for he immediately invited us to his cabin. This was built high above the beach in a little shelter behind the cliffs.

Leading to it was an almost perpendicular flight of stairs. The problem of his water supply was solved when I noticed a little spring at the foot of these steps.

The house was very small. There were two rooms. The tiny outer one was filled with crates and boxes, collected after being washed ashore. The inner, or sitting-room was narrow. There was barely enough space between the built-in bunk, stove, and table to enable us to crowd in. The boys were stowed on top of the bunk, while the rest of us sat on packing-box seats.

A small coal oil lamp, minus its glass chimney, cast a smokey glow from its perch above the bed. Resting close to his flickering light was a book which looked very much like a Bible.

On the walls hung but two pictures. One was of the King and Queen, the two royal children were in the other. As we commented on them Mr. Thompson told us that the latter had been given to him by a cousin of the Queen.

The moment we entered, a black and white cat jumped hurriedly off the bunk, making a hasty retreat out of the house. Our host said that his pussy was not used to so much company at one time. She would probably stay away until we left. He himself was entirely the reverse, telling us to was good to talk to someone again. Such a treat it was to listen to so many voices.

We came to the conclusion that he was hard of hearing, for when we asked any questions he did not seem to catch our words unless we shouted.

In lieu of going on relief, he had come to live on Passage Island. To start with, there had been nothing but the clothes he stood in, as well as a few provisions. Speaking of clothes brought to mind an act of beneficence. An elderly lady had visited him early last summer and had evidently noticed his worn apparel. A few weeks after her departure he had received a parcel of clothing from her. There was a pair of overalls, two shirts and some underwear.

The cabin had been built mostly of driftwood except for the roofing. This a good friend had donated. The little stove was a present from another acquaintance.

Had we noticed his flag from our anchorage? that was one of his proudest possessions. Three years ago, when he had first arrived, it had been put up and had flown from the top of that same cliff ever since. Brave as it looked it was practically in ribbons.

I asked him what he did about supplies. He glanced at the skipper's donation on the table.

"Oh, they seem to arrive from time to time," was the reply.

#### *Garden Hewn From Rocky Soil Of Island*

On being offered a cigarette Mr. Thompson disclosed he did not smoke, having never done so in his life.

The main part of his waking hours was spent in collecting wood from the beach or tending his flower and vegetable garden, he told us. I had seen the shadowy outline of a fair-sized cultivate patch. What a time it must have taken to turn that rock-strewn soil!

The best remembered excitement since his sojourn on the island was a pretty summer wedding. The day had been warm and bright and many guests had attended the ceremony who could not have crossed to the island had the weather been stormy.

The last glimpse I had of him, as we stood on the shore, was that of a shadowy, stooped, lonely man, waving his arms in farewell to guests he wished to stay.

One *Passage Island Legend* is that the wedding was the Swangard family in the summer of 1937 or 1938. Thompson watched the wedding but we do not know if he was an invited guest. Erwin Swangard was a famous newspaper editor in Vancouver and the P.N.E. Swangard stadium was named after him. I contacted Erwin's son Prof. Randy Swangard in Oregon and he said his parents were married in

Saskatoon. He suggested that it might be his aunt and uncle so I contacted his cousin, Dr. F.M. Swangard in Mission, B.C. who asked his parents and they said it was not them, although they kept a boat at Fisherman's Cove and often passed Passage Island. I can only conclude that the wedding was not from the Swangard family. Hence, this *Passage Island Legend* has now been disproved.

However, there are also legends of two other Passage Island weddings. Unity Bainbridge (born in 1916) is an artist who was a recipient of the Order of British Columbia in 1993 (Erwin Swangard also received this award in 1990) and is now living in West Vancouver. A Passage Island legend is that she was married on Passage Island and used to paint the shoreline and that she used to bring food to the hermit. I telephoned her to see if this was true. The answer was no, she was married at the top of Nob Hill in San Francisco. However, In 1940 her sister rowed her out to Passage Island and she painted a portrait of the hermit which she then sold and the current owner is unknown. She had also painted the squatters houses on the Kitsilano Indian Reserve in 1936-7. On August 1, 1997 she attempted to find the owner of the portrait and placed the following ad in the North Shore News:

5075 Art & Collectibles LOOKING FOR "The Hermit of Passage Island" 1940. Charcoal portrait by Unity Bainbridge OBC & also other works for historical reference. 925-6630.
--

The painting has not yet been found however she believes that the purchaser had bought the painting in the 1980's and had mentioned to her that she had been married on Passage Island.

Another Passage Island legend was that a couple named Morrow were married on the island and Mr. Morrow was a manager of the PNE before he retired. I contacted the PNE who gave me the address of Albert Morrow and contacted him on August 18, 1997. In a lengthy conversation he confirmed that he had been married on Passage Island to Mae Stacey in 1939 and he frequently visited the island and helped the hermit dig his well and used to bring him food. Mrs. Morrow died in 1976 and their children still live in Vancouver.

A good account of the hermit was provided by Cal Frost of Bowen Island in a telephone conversation to me in May of 1997:

Telephone Conversations with Ken White, May 29-30 1996. Address: JSC Frost, 1457 Woods, Bowen Island, 947-2265
--

My name is Cal Frost and I see your little notice in the Bowen Island Historians latest paper about the old chap who lived on Passage Island and I've just written up a few little items about him that I am aware of.

I lived on Bowen from 1935-42, I went to school here. My dad was with the forest service and we used to travel occasionally down the south end of Bowen there coming down from Sechelt

One day, we noticed fire coming up from the south end of Passage Island. We went over to check it out in case it was some campers who let a fire get away on them.

It turned out to be old John that was living there and we got to meet him once in a while. We used to go over, probably about twice a year and just drop in and visit him for a minute or two on the beach. He'd be around there.

He was kind of an interesting old fellow. I have no idea how old he would have been at the time because I was in my teens, anybody older than my dad was old. We used to just refer to him as "Old John".

He used to row over to Whitecliff to get groceries or food staples and what not.

He had one well that was dug just about high water from his beach at the south end there.

I had suspicions it was sort of fed by salt water; he said: "Oh, the water was pretty good 'A Little Brackish', but not bad." He said: "I'm working on another well, a little further up, probably will be a little better."

Another thing he mentioned was that he came down from the Yukon where he had been a "Sourdough", and I guess, or whatever he was: miner or trapper or something.

He had frozen his feet at one time up there and he hadn't any toes on his feet. He lost most of his toes. I don't know whether he lost them all or not but he lost most of them, I believe off his feet. He got around fairly well though, you wouldn't know it.

He was kind of interesting

We'd drop in there and have a cup of tea with him and just see how he was. We couldn't really leave the boat, no place to tie it up.

.... Cal Frost

In 1940, Mary Isabella Keith still owned the island. She had told Major Matthews that no permission had been granted to Thompson to live there but she was glad he was there. He acted as a watchman to prevent vandals from doing harm such as setting fires. Little did she know at the time that Thompson would soon be setting his own fires.

Hard times hit in 1943 when Thompson began to lose his mental and physical ability. Articles appeared in all the Vancouver papers periodically reporting how he had burned down his houses and eventually had to leave the island. The spelling of his name and his

age changed often in these articles but his actual age at the time was 73. The *Vancouver Sun* reported on November 8, 1943:

HERMIT BURNED OUT ON PASSAGE ISLAND:  
He'll Rebuild from Ashes

WEST VANCOUVER, Nov, 8 - With the ashes of his burned out home at his feet, a 75-year-old recluse turned down all offers of aid and refused to leave Passage Island Saturday night, after a fire had wiped out practically all his possessions. Passage Island is midway between Point Atkinson and Cowan's Point.

Residents of Fisherman's Cove say that John Thomson went to live on the island about four or five years ago after being evicted from Kitsilano Indian Reserve. Although handicapped by age and a club foot, he built a home for himself out of driftwood and bits of lumber kindly neighbors on the mainland gave him, and has lived the life of a hermit ever since.

Saturday night he was cooking his supper and the stove, close to the under dry wall, became overheated. Soon the little dwelling was in flames, and although an alarm was turned in from the mainland, the volunteer fire brigade saw on arrival that it was hopeless to save anything from the blaze.

William Thompson, West Vancouver fire chief, sent across to the island to see if anything could be done to aid the man, but he refused to come away.

"This is my home," he said simply. "I have salvaged more from the fire than I had when I came here, so I am that much ahead to start again. I am not leaving.

As far as the fire chief could make out the man had saved little more than his supper from the dwelling.

On November 8 the *Vancouver News-herald* also had an article:

FIRE DESTROYS HERMIT'S' HOME

A small house on Passage Island, occupied by "The Hermit", was completely destroyed by fire over the weekend. Cause of the fire is unknown. The flame swept structure cast a glow in the sky that could be seen for several miles.

A booster pump was rushed by West Vancouver Fire Department in a motor launch to the scene of the fire but was of little effect against the flames. The City of Vancouver police boat rushed to the island as did a crash boat from the R.C.A.F. station.

"The Hermit," said by police to be over 70 years of age, refused to give his name and also refused to be taken off the island. Provincial Police are arranging to look after the welfare of the man and take in some food.

After the fire another house was built in one day but only lasted until the next February when it burned. Thompson moved into another summer shack on the island belonging to someone else (Keith or maybe the Boy Scouts but most likely Luther Mottishaw) but he burned that one shortly after. The *Vancouver Province* on February 25 reported:

Passage Island Recluse: Hermit's Home Burns on Island For  
Second Time in Four Days:

For the third time - the second in four days - fire Thursday destroyed the home of Passage Island's 80-year-old hermit, John Thomson - a home he stubbornly refuses to leave, despite near starvation.

Eight years ago he moved into a shack on the island and has been there since, living on the donations of friends. Thursday night he spend in the open, while friends rushed food and dry clothing to the island.

REBUILT SHACK

Last November 6, the shack in which Thomson had been living for eight years, burned to the ground. W. Chappell, of Caulfeild, rushed to his aid and put up a shack built of four-inch lumber in a single day.

Sunday afternoon the old hermit hailed a party of fishermen returning from Howe Sound. He was without food or matches, so they gave him matches and reported to police.

When the provincial police patrol boat arrived Monday they found the hermit's second home destroyed by fire. The old man refused to leave his island and the police gave him food.

Wednesday, Mr. Chappell found the old man virtually starving. He had not eaten for two days. Mr. Chappell left \$10 and further supplies, including an old cook stove to replace the make-shift drum lost in the weekend fire.

THIRD HOME BURNS

Tuesday, the hermit moved into a summer cabin on the island, and Thursday morning fire razed it to the ground. When Mr. Chappell arrived on the island Thursday afternoon he found the old man sitting in a wheelbarrow in the garden of his gutted home.

Mr. Chappell built a fire and fixed up the old cookstove. The crew of a navy patrol boat gave the hermit some of their own personal clothing. The old man lost everything in Thursday's fire and Mr. Chappell will visit the island again today with food and dry blankets.

Provincial police say the old man will not leave his island home. He told them he wished everyone would just leave him alone.

The *Vancouver Sun* also reported that day (p. 15):

Island Hermit Burned Out Third Time

WEST VANCOUVER, Feb 25. The hermit of Passage Island, John Thompson, has burned himself out again, for the third time since last November.

He spent Thursday night without blankets or covering of any kind, huddled around a smouldering, smoky fire, in a vain endeavor to keep out the penetrating cold.

Almost eighty years, and handicapped by two stumps left from the amputation of his feet following frostbite, Thompson has consistently refused to leave his retreat on Passage Island. Last November all his worldly possessions went up in smoke. so isolated is he from the mainland that it is impossible to secure aid quickly enough when disaster strikes.

After his November fire, William Chappell of Caulfeild Gas Station and John Crawford of Fisherman's Cove built another shack for the hermit with the aid of Mr. Chappell's daughter and three young men.

On Tuesday night his second home went up in flames.

Thompson then moved to the shack of some other summer residents, but this also became a burning torch on Wednesday. All that the hermit had left was a few charred pans.

William Chappell took some dry clothing and food to the island late Wednesday, and reported that Thompson was expecting a tent and blankets from the navy patrol boat.

### **The Third House**

The newspaper articles did not reveal anything about "the shack of some other summer residents". In fact, this remained a mystery until the answer surfaced in 1998. The shack had been built by Luther Fred Mottishaw around 1938 when he was 58 years old. Luther died in 1962 at the age of 82. His son Bud, and fiance, Irene Morton spent several summers there. They rowed out from Kitsilano where they kept a boat at the foot of Bayswater street. In 1996 Irene, now Irene Gilmore gave a lecture on life on Passage Island to her sorority. She kept photographs of their shack.

#### **My Memoirs of Passage Island by Irene Gilmore**

I have here an article I cut out of the Vancouver Sun probably about 2 years ago. Unfortunately, I didn't keep track of the date. The article tells us about life on Passage Island today. I'm sure some of you have read it but I hope not too many because I want to read it out as part of this program.

(Article by Phil Matty, "Action Of Lighthouse Keeper Saved Pair",  
*Vancouver Sun, January 12, 1995, C1*)

Now, I'm going to try and tell you a little bit about life on Passage Island in the late 1930's when my fiance and I, sometime accompanied by his father, sometimes by a friend but most of the time on our own, rowed from Bayswater beach in Kisilano just about a short block along

a path from Kits Swimming Pool all the way to Passage Island with no life jackets! We couldn't afford them. The old row boat was our only means of transportation and if you don't believe that was quite a row, sometime when you are close to Kits Pool or Bayswater Beach take a look over to Passage Island just out from Fisherman's Cove.

There was only one cove we could pull into, around the rest of the island was all rock cliff. There were many Arbutus trees and lots of wild vegetation. We were not alone on the island, we found an old hermit, his name was Mr. Thomson, a very interesting and kind old gent. I remember him telling me nobody ever lived there because there was no water supply but he figured with all the wild vegetation there had to be water somewhere.

Anyway, he built himself a cabin of sorts and this was his home, his life. I know he used rainwater and I do believe he found a small supply of water, enough for him. He had both feet frozen off when he lived up north. The front part of his boots which he wore on his stumps, were all turned straight up because he had no feet to hold them out straight. He had two quite wild black cats, each has an extra claw on each paw.

We used to love going over there. We had fun climbing around and fishing from the rock cliffs. I lost a ring while climbing, the rock cut right through it and fell into the water. One night when we had Bonnie and a nephew, Bob with us (they were still kids) we fished off the cliffs until it was so dark we had to use a flashlight to find our way back. That was pretty scary.

Another weekend when we had my sister and young nephew with us, we slept under the stars, to wake up in the morning and find my nephew was missing. We found him rolled up in his blanket on a lower plateau. somehow, in his sleep, he had rolled down there. Talk about anxious moments and what a relief when we located him! Needless to say we didn't sleep in that area again. We had lots of fun and I have here about a half dozen old negatives and the pictures I had taken from them, it's amazing and interesting what they can do these days. The fellow in the North Shore Custom Photo said they would have fun working with them because they were so old and unusual. I think they did a pretty good job.

Anyway, all this will give you an idea what life was like on the Passage Island in the late thirties. There wasn't much money around but we did have fun.

I just thought of something else that might be of some interest. I'm not involved at all in this adventure but Passage does come into the picture.

On my nephew's 12th birthday in 1971, his parents, that's Bonnie and her husband, Chris, took some of Steven's??? pals out in their boat and were having a great time when a water logged pole, floating on end, bounced up and punctured the hull. Chris being a navy



man, went overboard and tried to stuff the hole with a pillow but wasn't being very successful. They were bailing water like crazy when Dave Buck of Dave Buck Ford and his wife and family came to the rescue. They took the kids to Passage Island and came back to tow Bonnie and Chris ashore but warned them if their boat really started to go under, they would have to cut loose and abandon the tow, it was that close to sinking. However, thanks to them, all were saved and they were able to repair the boat and continued their boating life for many more years.

## **The Final Years**

Apparently someone finally persuaded Thompson to leave and he was put in the care of the Salvation Army. A few days later on Feb 28 the *Vancouver Sun* (p.11) reported:

### **Hermit Happy and Hungry**

The homeless hermit of Passage Island, John Thompson, is back on his feet again -or what is left of them - and was out to lunch on Saturday, Major J.W. Habkirk, Salvation Army hostel superintendent, reported today.

Main concern of the 72-year old recluse, who was found at his island hideout in a starving condition after his cabin burned down last week is "food and more food." Major Habkirk said.

A day's meal tickets issued by the Salvation Army officer at noon lasted only one sitting, the evidence indicate, for he was back, empty-handed, at 5:30 p.m.

Friends brought him huge quantities of food on Sunday and he went to work on it enthusiastically.

Major Habkirk said that Thompson was "contented" and had no immediate desire to leave. Provincial welfare authorities are considering the case.

On March 2, the *Vancouver Province* (p.6) reported:

### **Relief Officials get Cold Reception From Aged Recluse**

James Thompson, 72-year old Passage Island hermit is still resting comfortably at Salvation Army social service headquarters on Gore Avenue, and is "receiving" daily.

The aged recluse, who was burned out from his home for third time last week, and brought to Vancouver by the provincial police, yesterday was visited by representatives of the provincial relief office, but he received them coldly.

"I wish nothing to do with relief," he declared haughtily, "I have money," at the same time displaying folding money received from friends who had visited him. They had also brought clothing.

Two final articles were written. One is from an unknown newspaper (probably *The Province* but not on the microfilm copy) on March 6 :

'Hermit' Moves In on Friend

Police were called Sunday to the home of Mrs. W. Ramsay, 4539 John Street, when John Thompson, the "hermit" of Passage Island, moved in and refused to leave the premises. He is being held by the police pending arrangements for his keep.

According to Mrs. Ramsay, the 'hermit' called at her home and asked for a bed, claiming he had last bought the house. When told there was no bed for him he laid down on a couch and refused to be moved.

He told Police he had been staying at the Salvation Army hostel and refused to return.

Major James Habkirk, head of the Salvation Army Social Service Department, said that Thompson left the hostel Sunday. He knew Mrs. Ramsay quite well, she being one of the old friends who had been in the habit of supplying him with food and clothing when he lived on Passage Island.

Thompson's home on Passage Island had burned down three times.

The other article was in the *Vancouver Sun* (p. 2) on March 6:

Pesters Householder: Hermit Gets Bed in Jail

John Thompson, "hermit of Passage Island," who has been in the news three times recently after he was burned out in his lonely island abode off West Vancouver, is in the jail at police headquarters.

He was taken into custody by Constable A.G. Scott and J.A. Adams at 8:30 a.m. Sunday after Mrs. W. Ramsay, 4539 John, complained that he refused to leave her house.

Mrs. Ramsey said that Thompson claimed that he owned the house and "wanted to go to bed".

She reported that she told Thompson that there was no bed there for him, but that he insisted on lying down on a couch and refused to leave.

Police were given to understand that Thompson had been staying at the Salvation Army for the past few days but declined to return here.

On March 6, 1944 John Thompson was brought to British Columbia Essondale Mental Hospital in Coquitlam, B.C. by Charles Palmer of 236 Cordova who was working with the Salvation Army. The hospital was given the police report of his arrest. The report indicated that Thompson was making some unbelievable claims that he had been working for the King's Secret Service and the government had

given him Passage Island in exchange for his good work. He claimed that the Japanese had burned down his houses three times. It should be noted that World War II was still going on at this time and reports of Japanese on the west coast frequently occurred.

Upon admission to the hospital as patient #21644 he was interviewed by two physicians and given a physical exam which reported his age as 74 years, height of 5' 8" and weight of 137 pounds. His description was that of a fairly well nourished man with grey hair and the left foot had been amputated to the ankle and all the toes on his right foot were amputated. His property included two B.C.E. (B.C. Electric, the bus and tram company) tickets, one broken watch, \$2.52 cash, 1 overcoat, 1 pair of pants, 1 shirt, and some other clothing in such poor condition that the hospital destroyed them. He said he came to Canada in 1888 and had poor education. He said he had a married sister in Oakland, California but did not know her name and she was never found. He had no old age pension.

Drs. K.D. Panton and Dr. Sydney Stewart Murray both assessed his mental condition. He reported to them that the King had made him a secret agent but he could not talk about that because the war was on. He said: "I would go to Hell for the King but Hell couldn't help a good Canuck". He told the doctors that Soviet spies were all over Vancouver and they had poisoned his food so he had to burn it. The doctors also noted the arrest report which stated that he would not leave the home of Mrs. Ramsey, claiming that it was his. On March 7, 1944 Judge Walker H.C. Firkins read the doctors reports and committed him to Essondale. A few days later the staff noted that he was Cheerful, Quiet, Delusionary, had a good appetite, was cooperative, and slept well.

The previous newspaper reports apparently brought some sympathy from the public. The Vancouver Sun forwarded a letter on March 9 from Mr. Chris Isfor of 2907 6th Street in New Westminster which contained \$2 for Mr. Thompson. (That would be equivalent to about \$20 today).

Thompson's health markedly improved at Essondale and he ate well. On April 21 he said he had been born again and had the body of a young man. In three months his weight increased to 165 pounds and by December he was at 172 pounds and 182 pounds the following summer a gain of 45 pounds in one year. On November 3, 1944 he stated that Essondale was the best place he had lived in years and was very thankful for anything done for him.

During his years at Essondale he had several friends and visitors including Mrs. William Ramsey whose house he had occupied and been arrested. Mary Withrow of 2029 Pendrell and 2318 Macdonald visited many times. as well as Mr. E. Thom of 4371 Perry Road in Vancouver, Mrs. R. Cheeton of 2621-14th Street in West Vancouver, Mrs. B. Vaughan of 1732-5th Avenue in Vancouver and Anne Duncan of 1915-2nd Avenue in New Westminster who brought him books to read. On August 20, 1946 Major Habkirk of the Salvation Army had written to check on the health of Mr. Thompson. In his letter he noted the danish spelling as Thomsen.

1947 was not a very good year for Thompson. He had continuous problems with his leg and on was admitted to Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster from May 1-5 for a mid-thigh amputation of his right leg. They reported he was totally deaf but birght and cooperative. On July 3, 1947 he was moved to the Home for the Aged in Port Coquitlam which was located next to Essondale. Curiously, his admission certificate stated that he was receiving a War Pension for serving in the Riel Rebellion. This Rebellion occured in 1885 which was three years before Thompson had arrived in Canada.

In April of 1948 he was interviewed by M. MacInn, a social worker to obtain information so that he might apply for an old age pension. However, because he was deaf and incoherent the required information could not be obtained and the application was discontinue.

His health continued to deteriorate. On June 9 the hospital had to use a camisole for his own protection. His last visitor was Mrs. K. Cheeton on June 14. He finally died at 6:55 P.M. on July 18, 1949. The hospital noted that his physical condition ad been poor for some time, that he had multiple bed sores, and his mental condition had markedly deteriorated. He had no relatives but two friends had been notified. He was buried in New Westminster Institutional Cemetary by the funeral home of S. Bowell and Sons of New Westminster. Dr. H. Lowe signed the death certificate and a bill for \$18 was received from S. Bowell for digging.

A 1967 Vancouver Province article reporting on a Passage Island fire stated:

"Passage Island, once known as Snake Island, was the scene of three house fires in the early 1940s when it was occupied by John Thompson, 80, a recluse. After Thompson's third driftwood shack burned he was taken to Vancouver and cared for by the Salvation Army until he died"

An Internet search of the B.C. Archives database of deaths showed many with the name of John Thompson, John Thomson, and James Thompson who died in the decade after 1944. The Internet lists only age, place, and date of death. To find a specific person requires searching individual microfilms of Death Certificates at the Vancouver Public Library. This would have been tedious but I took the Internet list and narrowed it down to a few names and found one who died in Coquitlam (Site of Essondale) in 1949. This was my first choice and in searching the microfilms it was the correct one!. The Death Certificate was my source for many fact, it lists the following details:

REGISTRATION OF DEATH: Reg No. 49-09-007047

1. Place of Death: *Coquitlam, B.C.*
2. Street or road: *Home for the Aged*
3. Length of Stay  
In Municipality where death occurred: *2 yrs, 15days*  
In Province: *61 yrs*  
In Canada: *61 yrs*
4. Permanent Residence: *Unknown*
5. Sex: *Male*
6. Citizenship: *Canadian*
7. Racial Origin: *Danish*
8. Marital Status: *Single*
9. Birthplace: *Als, Denmark*
10. Date of Birth: *August 2nd, 1870*
11. Age: *78 years, 11 months, 16 days*
12. Occupation: *Labourer*
13. Date last worked: *Unknown*
14. Total years in occupation: *Unknown*
15. Name of wife:
16. Name of father: *Unknown*
17. Maiden name of mother: *Unknown*
18. Birthplace: Father: *Denmark*, Mother: *Denmark*
19. Certified correct:  
Port Coquitlam, *19 day of July 1949*  
Informant: *Committal papers*
20. Burial, *July 21st, 1949*  
Place: *New Westminster, Cemetery: Institutional*
21. Undertaker Name: *S. Howell & Sons, New Westminster B.C.*
22. Date of Death: *July 18th, 1949*
23. I attended deceased from: *July 3rd, 1947*  
to *July 18th 1949*, and last saw alive *July 18, 1949*  
Immediate cause: *Chronic Myocarditis*  
Morbid conditions: *Arteriosclerosis*  
Other morbid conditions: *Senile Dementia*

The doctor's signature was not legible.

It is interesting to note item 7 (Racial origin). The provincial instructions specifically say: "RACIAL ORIGIN is defined in terms of the people or race to which the person - traced though the father - belongs, whether English, Irish, Scottish, French, German, Russian,

Ukrainian, etc. The terms "Canadian" or "American" should not be used for RACIAL ORIGIN, as they express CITIZENSHIP."

This also clears up the mystery of his age. At the time he left Passage Island in 1944 the newspapers had his age ranging from 72 to 80. In fact he was almost 74 at the time. He had arrived in Canada when he was 18 years old in 1888 which was just after J.C. Keith had moved to Vancouver and opened the Bank of British Columbia.

As the Death Certificate mentioned the New Westminster Institutional cemetery I decided to attempt to find his grave. The New Westminster Library has the actual records of S. Bowell & Sons and one can look up John Thompson in their card catalog which contains one card labeled "John Thompson, July 18, 1949". Deep in the storage of the library is the large book of 1949 records by S. Bowell & Sons. Photocopies of the records are not allowed by the card has some details not in the death certificate, including the address: Passage Island!

S. BOWELL & SON

Name of deceased: *John Thompson*  
Address: *Passage Island, B.C.*  
Place of death: *Home For the Aged, Port Coquitlam, B.C.*  
Date of death: *July 18, 1949*  
Sex: *Male*      Nationality: *Canadian* Racial Origin: *Danish*  
Birthplace: *Denmark*      Marriage state: *Single*  
Date of birth: *August 2, 1870*      Age: *78 years, 11 months, 16 days*  
How long at (a) place of death: *2 years, 15 days*  
(b) in Province: *61 yrs*      (c) in Canada: *61 years*  
Occupation: *Labourer*  
Name of father:      Birthplace: *Denmark*  
Maiden name of mother:      Birthplace: *Denmark*  
Name of informant: *Committal Papers*  
Address: *Essondale, B.C.*  
Relationship to deceased: *None*  
Place of burial, removal: *Institutional*      Location of grave:  
Date of burial, removal: *Thu, July 21, 1949*  
Time of service: *9:30 AM*  
Service held at: *Grave-side*      Religion: *Lutheran*  
Minister: *Rev. P.C. McCrae*  
Physician: *Dr. H. Lowe*  
Cause of death: *Chronic myocarditis, senile dementia*  
Family names:

Funeral Costs: *\$40.00 Sept 6/49 by Cheque, PAID IN FULL*

## A Not-so-restful Resting Place

John Thompson was buried in New Westminster Institutional Cemetery located at the Northwest edge of the grounds of the Woodlands School which was called the "Lunatic Asylum" when it first opened in 1878. Later the name was changed to "Insane Asylum". The Cemetery contains about 3000 graves and the last burial was in October 1958. All headstones were identical 16" x 10" with the persons' name and dates. In 1976 the Queen's Park Hospital was built next to the cemetery and the rooms had a view of the graves. Although John Thompson had died a new controversy arose to disturb his peace when it was decided to remove the gravestones so that the patients would not be able to see them. The *Vancouver Province* reported:

#### Gravestones Give Way To Park Seats

The rows of grave markers in a New Westminster cemetery will be replaced by flower beds and park benches under plans proposed by the Queen's Park Hospital Society.

The society has already acquired conditional approval from the provincial consumer affairs department to turn Woodlands Park cemetery on East Columbia into a park. It will be adjacent to the new 300-bed Queen's Park hospital, expected to be completed in about nine months.

The society will wait 90 days to consider any objections to the one-acre cemetery which has not been used for 10 years.

The land belongs to the provincial government and graves are those of people who died in government institutions.

The conditions attached to the plan are that the society maintain the park, that a shrine or some monument be established to commemorate those buried in the cemetery, and that a surveyed grid is kept so any individual grave site can be located.

"It's a progressive move and the plan should enhance the whole area." said society director Frank Butler.

A precedent was established in Victoria about 50 years ago when a cemetery near Christ Church Cathedral was modified in a similar way.

The plan to remove the gravestones was approved although controversial at the time. A 1977 Editorial in the *Victoria Times* was very critical:

#### A Tasteless Economy

There are apparently no limits to the accountant mentality of the Social Credit government even when it comes to matters of basic respect and taste. The plan now in the works to build a barbecue patio with the gravestones of children who died at Woodlands school in New Westminster is not a cruel joke - it is a serious proposal aimed at saving money. In cash terms it may make sense. In moral terms, the cost is too high.

According to a human resources department spokesman, the stones were moved when it became known that rooms in the new Queens Park extended care hospital under construction would overlook the graveyard. Relatives of the children

gave their approval for the move and a new cairn is to be erected in memory of the children. This much is acceptable. The plan to turn the children's names into the dirt and make a patio of the headstones is not. While it will not bother the dead, in this society we maintain a propriety and respect in this area which the government is threatening to ignore. The alternative has already been detailed by the human resources department spokesman, who said the stones could be either included in the patio or crushed. The choice should be clear, even if it means rewriting the government's bottom line.

All headstones have now been removed (except a few which remain for unknown reasons). A commemorative plaque was dedicated by Human Resources Minister William Van Der Zalm (who later became an unpopular Premier of British Columbia and forced to resign in a scandal). The plaque can be seen today and has the description:

Woodlands Memorial Garden

Dedicated To The Memory Of Those Residents  
Who Died In Provincial Institutions, 1900-1955 A.D.

For The Needy Shall Not Always Be Forgotten:  
The Expectations Of The Poor Shall Not  
Perish Forever PSALM 9 V:18

William Van Der Zalm  
Minister of Human Resources

Pauline Hughes  
Institutional Manager

September, 1978  
Woodlands Centennial Year

The gravestones were removed and the issue was forgotten until 1986 when a new controversy arose. The *Vancouver Sun* reported on Feb 20, 1986:

Gravestones Used To Pave Path: Coquitlam Mom Unnerved  
by Miguel Moya

Last summer, Lucille Schneider's nine-year-old daughter Kristal was playing in the yard of their Coquitlam home with a friend when they overturned a cement slab and discovered it was a gravestone.

"It kind of made me feel funny," recalled Schneider. "I told them to put it back where they found it in case it was an old grave."

Schneider found that all the slabs in her front-year pathway were gravestones - more than 100 of them.

Curiosity nagged at her for months before she called The Sun, which traced them to a former cemetery for Woodlands School for the mentally disabled.

The last burial in the cemetery was in October, 1958. In 1977, the cemetery was decommissioned by a provincial cabinet order. About 1,800 gravestones were removed and the land was converted to a park with a memorial plaque.

Their removal coincided with the building of Queens Park Hospital, whose officials felt a cemetery next door was inappropriate for an extended care hospital for the elderly.



Connie Clarke, president of British Columbians for Mentally Handicapped People, called the action "appalling."

"It would seem sad those people could not have been buried near their family members in the cemeteries around their families' homes ..." she said. "Just the fact that there was such a large cemetery and that it was thought to be easily disposable is just not right."

Frank Butler, Queens Park administrator, said the cemetery was decommissioned according to the rules. He said the hospital placed newspaper notices to publicize its intention to relatives of the dead and heard no objections.

Jo Dickey, a member of the Woodlands Parents Group when the cemetery was decommissioned, said her group was not notified of the move, although she heard about it.

Dickey said she feels "very uncomfortable" with the way the hospital disposed of the gravestones.

Dale Alexander, executive director of the Simon Fraser Society for Mentally Handicapped People, said he found it appalling that Woodlands residents were buried on the site of the institution in the first place, and, "Something else could have been done rather than simply giving the headstones away and having them end up as a sidewalk. I think that is atrocious."

Dr. Bluma Tischler, Woodlands medical director, said she would have heard if there had been any objections from families of the dead.

"My personal opinion is this is so many years ago now, and if you write a story like this it is quite a sensitive thing and it will bring up things for the parents. You have to be quite careful in dealing with the emotions of parents. It is something you will have to take responsibility for."

Provincial records show the hospital received only one objection to its plans from the family of a person buried in the cemetery; it was later withdrawn.

The gravestones at Schneider's home were placed there by Don Chivers, former owner of the property and an administrator at Queens Park's sister hospital, Fellburn Hospital in Burnaby.

Chivers said he had heard the gravestones were available. "As far as I was concerned they were just slabs of cement ... I turned them upside down so you wouldn't see the names on them."

Ten months after this article appeared the issue rose again and was reported for two days in the *Vancouver Province*. It appeared that ghosts had appeared on the property:

#### Grave Markers In Limbo by Salim Jiwa

Mike Whistler is facing a grave problem.

The 28 year-old self-employed laborer has been left with 130 grave markers emblazoned with the names of dead children.

"I think someone should lay them to rest properly," he told The Province yesterday.

Whistler said he was paid \$100 by a developer in November to remove the markers, which had been used to make a path to a Coquitlam four-plex.

"He didn't tell me what they were but when I turned them over I saw the names," said Whistler.

The Saddle Street four-plex has been bedeviled by strange noises, moving beds and erratic TVs. Tenants are convinced the residence is haunted by ghosts.

The sight of a groaning, headless monk sent tenant Dawn Hutton fleeing into the night with her four children two days ago, vowing never to return.

Whistler was planning to build a sidewalk with the markers until he read about Hutton's frightening experience in *The Province*.

Now, he thinks they should be returned to the Woodlands cemetery from which they were removed.

His younger brother, David, 25, agrees.

"They should go back to place where they came from."

Yesterday, Hutton remained outside while her friends packed her belongings for her.

But the ghoulies couldn't resist a parting shot.

"I left all the lights on when I went over to my mother's last night. When I came back to pick up my things, the lights were off and the children's toys were strewn down the stairs."

Other tenants are seeking help.

"My sister is arranging for the church to get involved," said Lucille Schneider.

"She's calling in a group called the Prayer Warriors."

David Whistler with the errant grave markers: "They should go back to the place where they came from."

As a result of the controversy Woodlands Hospital took back the headstones and *The Province* reported the next day that the issue was finally over:

Grave Stones RIP  
by Salim Jiwa

The grave markers will finally be able to RIP.

Woodlands Hospital in New Westminster yesterday agreed to take back all 130 markers uprooted nine years ago from a children's cemetery.

"If they are returned we will be pleased to accept them," hospital manager Susan Poulos said.

"We'll figure out what to do with them. Most likely we'll bury them in one spot."

Poulos said the markers -- which identified Woodlands patients who had died -- were removed in 1977 when an extension was built to neighboring Queen's Park Hospital.

It was felt the sight would upset and depress patients, many of whom were elderly and under extended care.

The parents of the dead children were consulted and agreed to build a shrine at the cemetery.

The grounds were turned into a small park but the hospital kept a grid map of the graves to direct parents to the exact spot where their loved ones were buried.

The markers surfaced earlier this week when tenants of a Coquitlam four-plex complained it was being bedeviled by strange noises, erratic TVs and even a headless, groaning monk.

The tenants laid the blame on the markers, which had been placed faced-down to form a path to the Saddle Street residence.

Landlord Simon Wong said he had the markers uprooted last month and replaced with a concrete footpath after buying the four-plex recently.

"If I had heard the stories I wouldn't have bought the property," said Wong.

The markers now sit in the yard of laborer Mike Whistler, who was paid to remove them.

Whistler said, he planned to make a sidewalk out of them. But after reading about their background, he and his brother David thought they should be returned to Woodlands.

"Great," David said yesterday when told of the Woodlands' offer. "We'll take care of it (delivering them to Woodlands)."

Many were returned to Woodlands and about 30 remain face down as an old patio next to a barbecue pit. Some have been turned over (permission to do so is required) but the headstone for John Thompson is not seen. Two lists were kept showing the gravesites and the lists do not always agree. The early list shows John Thompson as Patient Number 869 buried in Block 18 Lot 876. However, this spot cannot be found on the grid map. A later list shows him buried in Block 20, Plot 84 and this spot can be found on the map about 18 feet west of the boundary fence and 84 feet North of the McBride Boulevard side of the park. The Woodlands site is now maintained by B.C. Buildings Corp. as it remains controversial as a possible housing development or park. Meanwhile, many television shows and movies have been filmed there including X-Files, Police Academy, Poltergeist, and others.

### **Finally, a happy event**

Most of the history of John Thompson that is reported here was uncovered by extensive research by the author in 1997. As a result of this research the current Passage Islanders decided to celebrate his 127th birthday on August 2 with a party on the island. The guest of honour was Unity Bainbridge who had painted his portrait in 1940. T-shirts had been prepared declaring him the "Passage Island Original Hermit" with his quotation: "There always has to be a beginning and from there we can build, and it's fun". This wise saying still reflects life on the island today. Current residents of Passage Island view John Thompson with healthy respect as someone who led the way. The islanders all signed his birthday card which read:

*Don't Think Of It As Getting Older*

*-----  
Just Think Of It As Going On Ahead To Check Things Out For The Rest of  
Us!*

*Happy Birthday*

On August 2, 1998, the Guest of Honour at the Second Annual Hermit Day celebration was Bert Morrow who returned to the island after 50 years to rediscover the site of his wedding.

On July 18, 1999, the residents of Passage Island celebrated the Third Annual Hermit Day. This was the 50th anniversary of John Thompson's passing. Guests of honour were Bert Morrow who gave the memorial address and Irene Gilmore whose family owned the third house on Passage Island inhabited by Thompson.

## **PASSAGE ISLAND**

### **HERMIT QUOTES**

John Thompson, the Passage Island Hermit and first permanent resident, had many wise sayings. Here are some:

#### **1937**

"What I need will be sent"

"I have some already, not much, but enough" (*referring to water*)

"I will be provided for"

"I am going to grow vegetables, fruit, everything"

"I came to this country from Denmark over fifty years ago"

"Been a hobo all my life"

"I had a neat little place over on the other side, but the police drove out all the squatters. I got a friend to row me over to this island. I knew I could get along and not be a burden"

"I hope to build a house before winter"

#### **1938**

"They were kind to me, so I want to return it" (*referring to his house guests*)

"I rowed to the mainland several times for water - I haven't a good enough supply yet. Next winter there will be plenty"

"See potatoes, beans. Soon I shall have all I want"

"Oh, the water is pretty good 'A Little Brackish', but not bad"

#### **1940**

"Certainly, help yourselves from the well" (*speaking to a boater who stopped for water*)

"You have to love to do it, then it's fun"

"Some day we will have everything. I hope to have water melons and cantelopes next"

"There has to be a beginning, and from there we can build and it's fun"

"Oh, they seem to arrive from time to time" *(when asked about supplies)*

### **1943**

"This is my home, I have salvaged more from the fire than I had when I came here, so I am that much ahead to start again. I am not leaving" *(after his first house burned down)*

### **1944**

"I wish nothing to do with relief" *(after leaving the island)*

"I have money" *(trying to stay off of relief)* **PASSAGE ISLAND**

## **PASSAGE ISLAND**

### **MODERN HISTORY**

*"Man, they just ain't building anymore islands y'know"  
...Phil Matty, 1968*

In a special issue of Maclean's magazine dedicated to British Columbia in 1973 an article was written about the indigenous lifestyles of six British Columbians: They were J.V. Clyne, retiring chairman of the board of MacMillan Bloedel Limited, the largest most influential company in B.C; Chunky Woodward the owner of Woodward's Department Stores in B.C. and Alberta, Phil Matty, the first Emperor of Passage Island, Art Phillips, the Mayor of Vancouver; Rosemary Brown, the first Black Woman member of the B.C. Legislature; and the Fusion People a group of squatters in North Vancouver.

Today, it is considered politically incorrect for the island to have an emperor but in 1973 there was little dispute. The article reported:

#### **BC HILIFE: Phil Matty**

This is Phil Matty, the first Emperor of Passage Island.

Eight years ago, Matty owned a prosperous but not especially remarkable real estate outfit. A client asked him to unload 32-acre Passage Island, a mile and a half from West Vancouver. He failed. Eight years ago, nobody understood that islands, especially well-treed and uninhabited islands, were sanctuaries from the 20th century.

Phil Matty understood. He bought Passage Island himself, for \$60,000.

Passage Island is now worth, at the very least, a million dollars.

Matty knew that the way to beat the frontier was to package it and preserve it; if the pioneers had become rich by exploiting the land, he would become rich by saving it, by returning it to its original form. It was a gradual way to make money.

Matty subdivided Passage Island into 60 lots, on the island's own terms; each lot is defined by natural boundaries. He approves, and will continue to approve, all architectural designs, all plumbing, all electricity, all fencing, floats and buoys. He decides who is to be permitted to buy a lot. One fellow admired the trees, and then said that they would make a nice log cabin. He was not permitted to buy a lot. He had missed the point. He did not understand that in a sanctuary - especially in a sanctuary - a tree vertical is worth 10 times a tree horizontal.

Rich people are not necessarily people of genius. Dicks have made a million dollars before, and will again. But only a genius can make sociology gather a million dollars for him. Phil Matty became rich because he understood the ambivalence of the frontier, that pioneers enjoy the process of turning things into money, the process of liquidating territory, but then they feel ashamed of the residue and want to be apart from it, so they pretend it does not exist. He also understood that pioneers like to do all this within easy commuting distance of their crowded, downtown office.

"I am emperor of the Island," says Matty. And he *is* emperor of the Island. He, and he alone, can give permission to cut a tree. He, and he alone, can give approval to a house. He knows that when you create a counter-frontier, you must control it. He has built his own home there.

Phil Matty is one of the first of the new rich: those who make their money by maintaining their purity. He is an honorable man, and he sleeps very well at night. He represents the passing of the robber barons. He is the first donor baron, and good luck to him and his island.



## **PASSAGE ISLAND**

### **Logistics and Resources**

*"Regular hydro service will probably be available when more houses are built on the island"*  
*Western Homes and Living Magazine, 1969*

The above quote was wishful thinking. The fact is that Passage Islanders will never have the public utilities enjoyed by many islands and the mainland.

#### **I. Electricity**

Early islanders mistakenly thought that like other islands, the day would come when B.C. Hydro would bring electricity to Passage Island. An article describing the first home on Passage in the magazine Western Homes and Living stated in July 1969 that:

"A small generator and battery run the pump, and provide bathroom lighting. Regular hydro service will probably be available when more houses are built on the island."

Nearly thirty years and 23 houses later, B.C. Hydro still has not yet arrived.

Most early houses simply ran on a 12 volt system using the same equipment found in boats. One exception was the McKinnon house which had an unusual 32 volt system (it has since been converted to 12 volt). McKinnon thought the system was a good idea at the time because many fishing boats were using 32 volts.

As Inverters came on the market it was possible to run 110 volt AC appliances so many houses developed twin wiring systems. Several of these were unusual, one has a regular city house electrical outlets except the top is AC and the bottom is DC. There have been occasions of plugging in the wrong side and burning out an appliance. Other houses were careful to separate them and label the outlets. Newer houses have separate receptacle types for AC and DC so it is impossible to make a mistake. Inverters have become more cost effective so that newer houses run almost completely on AC as houses do in the city. The first house to have a true sine wave inverter was on Lot 19 in 1995.

Initially batteries were charged by gasoline or propane generators. Some houses obtained windmills and a few are still in use. However, in the 1990's Solar power became cost effective and largely

thru the urging of Rick Speedie (Lot 32) virtually every house on the island now has solar panels and only uses generators for backup or to provide AC power if no inverter is available. Most houses have more power than they need in the summer but still need generator backup in the winter. Years ago B.C. Hydro estimated it would cost a half million dollars to bring service one mile across the channel to Passage Island. Interestingly enough they did it to Piers Island (a distance of three miles) for only \$50 per household. Today, if B.C. Hydro were to offer to connect to their houses, most islanders would tell them to go away.

## **II. Fishing**

In 1902 a government report on Howe Sound said "the fish can ...be literally raked out of the water"

## **III. Heat**

The hermit heated his home by fire. He was given a wood stove by a friend. He also burned down three houses while on the island. The first homes used wood stoves using logs collected on the beach. This is still the most common heating system. Propane tanks were usually hand carried to the island. In 1981 the McKinnons used a helicopter to fly 80-gallon tanks to the island twice a year. When the propane boat started service with 500 gallon storage tanks on the island it became more feasible to use propane heat and this is now used by many houses.

## **IV. Refrigerator**

In the winter, one can use the outdoors as a refrigerator. This is what the hermit did. Now, the only feasible system is a propane refrigerator and almost every house has one. Some try to do with a 12 volt cooler but these still use a lot of electricity.

## **V. Stoves**

The most popular form of cooking stove is a propane stove and a Microwave or Barbecue. Microwave ovens are very practical in the summer when electricity is abundant. In the winter one has to be careful not to excessively use microwaves or toasters as they use substantial amount of electricity.

## **VI. Telephone**

Passage Island has never had regular telephone service. The hermit used to signal the mainland by lighting fires. The first houses

used Marine Radiotelephone and some still have these systems. When cellular telephones became available they quickly became the system of choice on Passage Island. Costs are high, especially during the day but B.C. Tel is not interested in providing regular service. Islanders are always looking for new improvements and are experimenting with new technologies. The first islander to use a cellular phone to obtain email and internet was Wolfgang Strigel, the next was Ken White. The first with a cellular fax machine was Jorg Helssen. These developments came in 1996.

## **VII. Television**

Passage Islanders do not have cable TV or even satellite dishes although dishes are feasible. However, many houses have televisions and get their signals the old-fashioned way through an antenna. On the East side of the island it is easy to get channels 2 (CBC), 6 (CHEK), 8 (BCTV) and 26 (CBCF). On the South and West sides it is easy to get channels 10 (CKVU) and 12 (KVOS). A new Vancouver channel is expected in late 1997. With proper antennas or boosters it might be possible to receive all of these channels. Most are operating 12 volt televisions but some have 110 volt sets. VCRs are also available in some houses.

## **VIII. Transportation**

In 1891, J.C. Keith and party came to Passage Island by canoe. The hermit, John Thompson had a friend row him over in a dinghy in 1937 and he used patched up dinghys during his days on the island. Until 1993 most islanders had their own boats or hitched a ride with another islander. In that year, after some organization by islanders Bruce Falkins from the Fisherman's Cove Esso Barge started a water taxi service at a cost of \$5.00 each way or \$10.00 if there was only one passenger. In 1997 the price increased to \$6.00. Many other islands in B.C. have subsidized ferry service either from B.C. Ferries or a subsidy is given. For example, the round trip far to Bowen island is only \$4.50 for a longer distance. This is not the case for Passage Island although island children going to school are eligible for a subsidy.

There have been many types of boats used by islanders over the years ranging from dinghys to zodiacs to sailboats to powerboats. Many boats have been smashed on the rocks or drifted away in storms.

Wolferstan reports (1982):

"Although Passage Island is private and there is very little foreshore to speak of, temporary anchorage is possible with protection from afternoon winds at the northeast end of the island or in calm weather, just off a small beach at the southeast end.

## **IX. Water**

The first water system on the island was built by John Thompson, the hermit. Before he dug his first well, he put a tin can out to collect rain water. As it was summer time, he did not have much and had to row over to the mainland for water. His first well was dug on the south end but close to the high water mark on the beach. Cal Frost, a visitor, remarked that it seemed like salt water to him but Thompson replied it was not too bad, "a bit brackish" and said he planned a further well further up. Eventually, Thompson had dug three wells and even supplied water to passing boats. Remains of the wells can be found on the island. One is around Lot 58 on the south end, one was on Lot 5 on the southeast end. A remaining mystery is a continuous "wet spot" on the main trail in the center of the island. Nobody knows why but it always seems wet, even in the dry summer.

When Phil Matty bought the island in 1965 he had been building houses in Belize and discovered that much of the world collected rainwater and stored it in cisterns. This method had not been used much in B.C. but he designed the first houses to use it. Variations on this system have been used on all houses on the island with the only new developments being plastic tanks instead of concrete or wood and metal or vinyl roofs instead of concrete.

The Western Homes article on the Sinclair house described the first water catchment system:

"Rain water runs down three grooves in the roof, is caught and stored in a cistern under the house, and a small pump forces the water through the plumbing system. The roof collects 500 gallons of water for every inch of rainfall"

Bill Wolferstan in his Cruising Guide to B.C (Vol. 3) reported in 1982:

"The efforts of some ingenious islanders to devise efficient raincatching roofs to augment sparse water supplies have had mixed results. Apparently the roofs tend to also catch offerings from some of the other one thousand residents on the island - Glaucous-winged seagulls.

Current storage systems are:

Lot 19 (2500 Gallons)  
Lot 26 (4000 Gallons)  
Lot 32 (5000 Gallons)  
Lot 30 (10000 Gallons)

## **Birds**

Seagull and Guillemot nesting colonies were reported in 1959.

A 1975 report (p. 94 and A-34) by the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Islands Trust identified Passage Island as follows:

### **III MODERATELY HIGH PRIORITY AREAS**

Passage Island (25 acres) (2-WVM) Fairly significant sea bird colony (cormorants, Gulls, Pigeon Guillemot); island occupied by number of residences, 10 owners.

The indication 2-WVM is an indicator of a High (**2**) Natural Feature Rate with **Wildlife** with numerous opportunities to view birds, Terrestrial **Vegetation** such as wild flowers and **Marine** features. Passage Island was listed 7th out of 12 significant Sea Bird Colonies in order of importance in the areas of B.C. that were studied.

Another report in 1977 recommended (p. 11)

The Nature Conservancy of Canada and The National Second Century fund should consider the following areas high in priority in a program of acquisition of natural areas in the Lower Mainland: Chehalis River mouth; Sumas Slough; Ladner Marsh private portions; Burns Bog portions; Laxton and Judson Lakes; Nicomen Island areas; Passage Island; Widgeon Valley.

## **North Steps**

In 1964-65 Bob Knowles and Phil Matty built a cantilevered system with large logs on the East Bay. Holes were drilled into the rock and an iron "staple" was inserted and can still be seen today. Bob Knowles was almost injured by when this was done by flying hot metal. This area has been used by Jorg Helssen ever since he first arrived and he was not sure who had built them.

Over many years Jorg Helssen built and rebuilt a landing platform and in 1993-4 a group of islanders constructed concrete steps leading down to the water. This project was not finished until 1997 when the wooden deck was rebuilt.

## PASSAGE ISLAND

### Economics

*"Man, they just ain't building anymore islands y'know"  
...Phil Matty, 1968*

#### Houses (Date Started)

1981 - 15 Houses  
1984 - 16 Houses  
1991 - 20 Houses  
1994 - 22 Houses  
1995 - 23 Houses

#### House Construction by date when house started

#	Date	Lot	Original Owner
1	1968	Lot 50	Hale and Lorea Sinclair
2	1968	Lot 56	Phil and Julie Matty
3	1970	Lot 44	William and Irene Mari
4	1971	Lot 41	Gordon and Jerry McPhee
5	1972	Lot 35	Mike and Carol Hooper
6		Lot 60	Ken and Ruth Slade
7	1974	Lot 33	Dorothy Rizer
8	1974	Lot 15	Clay and Edna Knowlton
9	1974	Lot 26	Jorg and Mika Helssen
10	1976	Lot 51	Vera Mackay
11	1976	Lot 2	Eleanor Worman
12	1977	Lot 30	Bill and Beth McKinnon
13	1979	Lot 14	Bill and Elizabeth Griffin
14	1981	Lot 17	Keith and Joy Bradbury
15	1982	Lot 32	Rick Speedie
16	1982	Lot 46	Zoltan Kuun
17	1990	Lot 5	Bill and Jan Mulder
18	1990	Lot 12	Victor Senoner and Stephan Sonderhoff
19	1990	Lot 61	Ed Vernon
20	1991	Lot 28	Colin Turner
21	1992	Lot 31	Wlodek Jankowski
	1993	Lot 49	HOUSE DEMOLISHED (Vera Mackay)
22	1994	Lot 39	Jan and Clive Baxter
23	1994	Lot 40	Juhan and Haeley Lindau
24	1995	Lot 19	Samantha Macintyre and Ken White
25	1997	Lot 52	Bob and Sue Vandermeer
26	1997	Lot 22	Tony and Paula Tang

- 27 1997 Lot 9 Steve and Marja Harmer  
28 1997 Lot 54 Kevin and Diane Roberts

### **Passage Island Occupations**

Accountant - Stu Scott, John Verver

Architect - Woo, Helmer Scholtz, Jorg Helssen, Wlodek Jankowski, Gary Hansen

Artist - Drew Burnham

Author - Joy Bradbury

Auto Mechanic - Mr and Mrs Conboy

Auto Dealer - Dave Buck

Biologist -

Broadcaster - Keith Bradbury

Brewer

Builder - Jim Tarnowsky

Businessman - Wilfred Stein

Carpenter - Colin Turner

Chef - Martin Hanning

Contractor - Bob Moloughney, Williams

Counsellor - Samantha Macintyre

Court Reporter - Cherry

Dentist - Tom Walters, Cathy Mari

Draftsperson

Engineer - Banks (wanted elevator), Emil Bolletar, Zoltan Kuun

Englishman - Raymant

Fireman

Furniture Sales - Dale Rockle

Flipper - Landauer

Hermit - John Thompson

Househusband -

Housewife -

Jack of All Trades -

Jill of All Trades -

Labourer

Lawyer - Carfrae, Richardson, Drew White

Longshoreman - Bob Vandermeer, Chad Matty

Movie Business - Sharon Broccoli, Eric Norlin, Debra Johnson

Musician - Buff Allen, Grant Horricks

Ocean Movement and Transport - Fred Parkinson

Pharmacist - Wesson

Police

Professor - Dorothy Rizer, Vera Mackay, Ken Slade, Eleanor Worman,  
Ken White

Psychiatrist - Dawson (student of dorothy)

Psychologist - Sookyung Chang

Radiologist - Gordon McPhee

Realtor - Phil Matty, Abe Fehr

Rest home owner - Anna Jaworsky

Retired



Salesman - Eric Jones

Sales Manager - Deborah Bennett, Mark White

Sawmill - Tom Matty

Stock Broker

Student

Supermarket Sales -

Teacher - Hale and Lorea Sinclair, Lori Dutton, Galey

Tradesperson

Volunteer Worker

X-Ray Technician - Carol Hooper

### **Cost Estimates**

Cable (1993) \$350,000

Dock (1993) \$400,000

Breakwater(1993) \$600,000

## **PASSAGE ISLAND**

### **Politics**

*"There are no regulations for Passage - and none are contemplated"*  
*Greater Vancouver Regional District*

The above was written by the GVRD to Passage resident Bill McKinnon sometime before 1981.

Island politics can be interesting and Passage seems to have some things in common with other islands, controversies. It would be unusual for all islanders to agree on everything so they simply agree to disagree. This is not unique to Passage Island. Examination of the history of other islands in British Columbia shows that it is quite common.

#### **I. Anarchy**

One of the attractions about Passage Island is the desire to leave the city and get away from it all. This is what brought the hermit John Thompson to the island and it is still true today. In 1981, Bill McKinnon of Lot 29 said:

"I suppose you'd say we're anarchists. We have to travel four miles by boat to Bowen Island to vote. We belong to the Islands Trust but we don't have any representation on its board. We're administered by the Greater Vancouver Regional District but my most treasured possession is a letter from them saying there are no regulations for Passage -- and none are contemplated." (Bradbury, p. 153).

#### **II. Islands Trust (IT)**

Passage Island is part of Islands Trust but is lumped in with Bowen Island. There is a representative elected from Bowen but the representatives have only held meetings with Passage Islanders twice in the entire history of the island. In 1992 a meeting was held but it was on the mainland. Islands Trust did not come out to Passage. In 1997 the newly elected representatives did come out for a public meeting for about two hours. They explained that Islands Trust did not

have any money, that GVRD had the money. However, property tax bills show that Islands Trust collects more than GVRD.

### **III. Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD)**

"Bowen Island is classified by the provincial government as unorganized territory, which, unlike a municipality, has not central administration. It must either depend on the various provincial government departments to supply service, or make shift on its own, as often as not doing without" (Howard, p.118)

While Bowen Islanders often complain about the GVRD they should be happy that "a portion of the mill rate rebated to the G.V.R.D. was set aside for local planning" (Howard, p. 142)

Passage Island is part of GVRD District C which was created in 1968 and includes Bowen Island, Bowyer Island, Croker Island, Hutt Island, and Barston Island. However, the elected representative is always from Bowen Island and has never visited Passage Island. The GVRD is the official local government for Passage Island but they try not to govern and they are quite successful at never spending any money for facilities on Passage.

They do not seem at all interested in providing any services which other communities get like: fire protection, mail, water, electricity, library, school, hospital, voting.

### **IV. B.C. Highways Department**

The trail through the island belongs to the Highways Department. There are no motor vehicles on the island so the road is mainly for walking. In early years the Highways department actually came out a few times a cleared the trails of fallen trees and debris. This was the only government service provided on the island. However, they have stopped and the trail is regularly cleared by Dorothy Rizer who bought the first lot in 1965. In 1997, on Dorothy's 88th birthday she was presented with the "Keeper of the Trails Award". She continues to stay on the job. Fortunately, the Highways Department has not yet asked her to join the union.

The only time the Highways Department ever has to do anything is when permission is asked to extend a septic field over the highway. This has happened a few times and Passage Island is the only place in B.C. where permission has been granted. It, of course, is a source of controversy on Passage.

## **V. Taxes**

Passage Islanders receive one very efficient government service and are taxed for it. The Property tax notice includes an item for the BC Assessment Authority with a tax rate of .1215 per \$1000 of assessed value. This yields the BCAA about \$2500 for the island. The service islanders get for that is annual assessment of their property with a tax bill. The BCAA is very good, they arrange to send tax notices out to all property owners. In addition, the assessor makes periodic visits to the island, the only government official to regular visit. Other government agencies do not seem to be able to find the addresses of islanders very easily and almost never send representatives out.

Passage Islanders pay what is called Local Service Taxes to the GVRD and Islands Trust. In exchange these two government bodies do their best to stay away from the island. Some islanders call the taxes "a privacy fee". The GVRD tax rate in 1997 is .4890 per \$1000 of assessed value. This is the same rate in all areas of GVRD Electoral Area C which mainly includes the high service area of Bowen Island. The taxes paid to Islands Trust is even higher with a tax rate of .7164 per \$1000 of assessed value. It is estimated by the author that the total tax revenue paid by Passage Island for Local Services is approximately \$10,000 per year. This does not include residential property taxes paid to the province for schools, rural taxes, and hospitals. What do islanders get for the \$10,000 each year? Well discussions with both GVRD and Islands Trust indicate that we should not expect anything other than zoning and building permits. However, we do get to visit the modern GVRD offices in Burnaby and they are always happy to talk to us. In June of 1997 Eva Mendal (telephone 432-6340) of the Electoral Areas office of GVRD said that we might be able to qualify for some funds from the Grants-in-Aid category. She even said that our elected representative, Richard Littlemore knows where Passage Island is. However, the entire budget for Grants-in-Aid for all of Electoral Area C which covers a very large area is only \$12,500.

It was explained to me by GVRD that Bowen and Barston islands have additional taxes for their services like library, garbage, water, etc. If we expected to actually receive some local services we would have to pay more than the \$10,000 per year which is the amount we just pay for them to leave us alone.

## **VI. Voting**

It is difficult for Passage Islanders to vote. There has never been a polling station provided on the island. Islanders have had to go over to Bowen Island or West Vancouver on election day. The GVRD is responsible for holding the election for both GVRD and Islands Trust officers. A request for on-island voting in 1996 was turned down because it would have been too difficult to train anyone. On the day of the 1996 election, a storm blew across the channel and it was not easily possible to leave the island. The result is that Passage Islanders were effectively prevented from voting. None voted in 1996. Since Bowen Island dominates Electoral Area C all candidates are from Bowen Island and any issues of concern to residents off Bowen Island are never discussed.

## **VII. Passage Island Committee of Management (PICM)**

In 1985 the island was developing a good permanent population and Phil Matty formed the PICM (with himself as Chair) to administer the island covenants. In 1990 after finding that the PICM could be held liable in a law suit he took back control of the covenants.

The members of PICM were:

1985 Phil Matty (Chair), Jorg Helssen, Liz Griffin, Clay Knowlton  
Helga Bolletar, Dorothy Rizer, Ken Slade  
1989 Phil Matty (Chair), Jorg Helssen, Liz Griffin, Clay Knowlton  
Dorothy Rizer, Ken Slade  
1990 Phil Matty (Chair), Jorg Helssen, Liz Griffin, Clay Knowlton  
Dorothy Rizer, Ken Slade, Eleanor Worman

## **VIII. Passage Island Homeowners Association (PIHA)**

A few islanders who wanted to have greater voice in island affairs and also create a social organization created the PIHA in 1991. Dues are \$25 per year and newsletters come out twice a year along with two meetings and social events. Most of the members of PIHA own houses on the island or are planning to build.

The following lists PIHA officers and committees:

Year	President	Secretary	Treasurer
91-92	Barry Payne	Eleanor Worman	Bill Griffin
92-93	Eleanor Worman	Victor Senoner	Bill Griffin

93-94	Deb Anderson	Bonny Morris	Bill Griffin
94-95	Rick Speedie	Barbara Cohen	Sylvia Dalgish
95-96	Eric Norlin	Jan Mulder	Sylvia Dalgish
96-97	Drew White	Jan Mulder	Simon Scott

Year	Notice Board	Newsletter	Keeper of Trails
91-92	Cathy Mari	Deb, Drew, Cathy	Dorothy Rizer
92-93	Cathy Mari	Deb, Drew, Cathy	Dorothy Rizer
93-94	Cathy Mari	Deb, Drew, Cathy	Dorothy Rizer
94-95	Cathy Mari	Deb, Drew, Cathy	Dorothy Rizer
95-96	Samantha Macintyre	Deb, Drew, Cathy	Dorothy Rizer
96-97	Samantha Macintyre	Deb, Drew, Cathy	Dorothy Rizer

#### Other Temporary Committees:

1991-92 Inter-Government (Clay Knowlton, Colin Turner, Ginette Montreuil, Deb Anderson, Victor Senonner, Sylvia Dalgish)

1991-92 Community Membership (Drew White, Bill Mulder Stefan Sonderhoff, Wolfgang Strigel, Jan Mulder, Liz Griffin)

1994-95 Mothers of Confederation Committee (Eleanor Worman. Deb Anderson, Samantha Macintyre)

## **IX. Passage Island Property Owners Association (PIPOA)**

In 1992, Phil Matty had decided that the PIHA was not operating in the best interests of some islanders, in particular, lot owners and he founded the PIPOA and is the current President. Dues are \$5 per year and he writes a quarterly newsletter.

## **PASSAGE ISLAND**

### **People**

*"There are really only two kinds of people in the eyes of Passage residents. Those who are competent enough to exist on the island, and those who are not committed enough to stay"*  
*...Joy Bradbury, 1981*

### **Weddings**

Passage Island had the first wedding in the 1930's and it may have been in the Swangard family. The second wedding was in February 1997.

### **Island Babies**

No person has ever been born on Passage Island but several knew it as their first home soon after leaving a mainland hospital delivery room. The first were Kim and Chad Matty.

"Passage's youngest resident two-year-old Jay, was almost the island's first baby because his parents decide they would rather confront Jay than a fierce Squamish storm one winter night. He was born next day in North Vancouver after the storm subsided."(Bradbury, p. 154)

Recently Ella Lindau became the first island baby in almost 20 years.

Other children moved to the island before they could walk and talk or certainly the island is their earliest memory. Jann and Erik Helssen.

### **Accidents and Injuries**

"A recent 30-foot tumble down a cliff resulted in a gash for one of Passage's usually nimble-footed children - the same child who as an infant riding on his mother's back, went head over heels with her when the ramp they were on split in half." (Bradbury, p. 154)

"There was the time a load of windows was dropped on one of the residents by an incoming helicopter, and the story of the septic tank that fell overboard" (Bradbury, p. 154)

### **The 25 year club**

Islanders who have lived on the island for more than 25 years include Phil and Julie Matty, Dorothy Rizer, Jorg and Mika Helssen, and Eleanor Worman.

# **PASSAGE ISLAND**

## **Law**

*"the Restrictive Covenant in question does not run with the land"*  
...Madam Justice Mary Ellen Boyd, 1995

In the 1990's a Passage Island case made it all the way to the B.C. Supreme Court. The old house on Lot 51 formerly owned by Vera Mackay had deteriorated and become a nuisance. After considerable legal actions, Islanders obtained permission from the owners to demolish the house. The following notice appeared on the Passage Island Notice Board in 1993:

### Passage Island HOUSEWRECKERS

HEREBY CORDIALLY REQUEST all able-bodied and OK-bodied persons as well as sundry cheerleaders, supporters, on-lookers, film-makers, party-goers, including the curious, the insand and he merely stupid,

TO ATTEND:

Place: LOT 51. "the shack"

TIME: October 2nd, SATURDAY 10am -12 noon.  
for "INTERIOR Renovations" and materials scavenge  
followed by a BEER LUNCH  
and:  
October 3d, SUNDAY, 10am - 2 pm  
for The ROOF, The WALLS and EVERYTHING ELSE  
including a second BEER LUNCH and such  
other appetizers as might be donated (get the hint?)

GOAL: To demolish the cabin into  
ITSY-BITSY PIECES so that  
the debris can be barged away  
R.S.V.P. if you feel like it

The legal proceedings are best described in a series of articles by Drew White in the Passage Press.

The April 1994 issue reported:

### P.I. LAW

The derelict house on Lot 51 is gone, thanks to the joint efforts of certain Islanders who tore it down with permission and gusto last Fall! Remnants of the house remain, despite a promise by the owner that debris would be barged away within 60 days after demolition. A multi-party lawsuit to have the long-time owner clean up the property carries on.



## The Spring 1995 issue reported:

### SUPREME COURT LAYS DOWN LAW

The BC Supreme Court has recently ruled on issues of enormous consequence to Passage Islanders

In a January 18th decision, Madam Justice Mary Ellen Boyd concluded that Delta Shelf Co. Ltd was liable in nuisance to remove debris lying on Lot 51. Delta Shelf was also ordered to conduct no burning on the property, in light of past conduct. Of greater surprise, Justice Boyd ruled that the Restrictive Covenant was not enforceable.

Delta Shelf purchased the property in July 84 and was believed to be a small collection of investors headed by a Fraser Valley lawyer. Initially, Delta Shelf began to repair an older cabin on the lot but abandoned the project for unknown reasons in the late 1980's. The unused property began to rapidly deteriorate, attracting vandals who made matters worse. In the late 80's and early 90's a number of Islanders contacted Delta Shelf regarding the condition of the property. No improvements were made, despite oral and written assurance to the contrary.

In August 93 an action was commenced naming 11 Islanders as Petitioners who were requesting that Delta Shelf abide by the Restrictive Covenant and either repair or remove the nuisance on Lot 51. In September 93, a written agreement made on the Courthouse steps provided that Islanders would demolish the cabin free of charge and Delta Shelf would remove the debris within 60 days. The cabin was demolished within days but the debris remained, forcing the issue back to Court for final hearing on November 15, 1994.

Islanders presented their case supporting the Restrictive Covenant with the assistance of 22 affidavits from 16 people, consisting of 112 pages of text, 19 pages of exhibits and 43 photographs, all explained by oral submissions, written briefs, references to legal texts plus case citations starting from the 17th century. The Petitioner's case generated over 750 pages of photocopied material and required 5 Court appearances in total. At the conclusion of the hearing on November 15th, Justice Boyd reserved her decision, (with a promise to read all the affidavits) taking two months before releasing the final Reasons for Judgment.

Delta Shelf has filed an appeal with the BC Court of Appeal, seeking to overturn the finding of nuisance, the burning injunction and the order to pay taxable costs. The appeal is not likely to be heard before 1996. The Supreme Court's finding concerning the Restrictive Covenant was not a part of the appeal, leaving that ruling standing.

At least three conclusions might be drawn from the litigation thus far: 1) The Court system is not a time or cost efficient method of resolving Island disputes; 2) A Restrictive Covenant is not a foolproof means of regulation; 3) Island neighbours owe stricter duties to each other than mainland neighbours.

### WHAT THE COURT SAID:

About the Covenant:

"I agree with the respondent's counsel's submission that the Restrictive Covenant in question does not run with the land and therefore, cannot be enforced against the respondent"

About the Community:

"The fact that the respondent's property is located on Passage Island is a significant factor in determining the character of the neighbourhood. Passage Island has no fire brigade and no police presence whatsoever. Neighbours rely on one another for security and fire prevention and fire-fighting. The community is small and relies, in large measure, on self-help to deal with such matters. In a community where there is no police or fire department, an occupier of land must be prepared to accept a greater degree of responsibility for preventing potential security and fire hazards from arising on his or her property. Neighbouring occupiers, in turn, have a right to expect that their neighbours will be more vigilant in preventing and abating such nuisances. While the respondent's use of its property might not constitute a nuisance in a less isolated, more developed neighbourhood with fire and security services nearby, its use in the instant case is entirely inconsistent with the character of the neighbourhood in which the property is situated."

The Spring 1996 Passage Press reported the latest on the Lot 51 case as well as a new matter concerning Lot 3:

#### LINGERING LITIGATION

Lawsuits involving Passage Island have been grinding thorough the B.C. Supreme and Appeal Courts.

Last July a foreclosure Petition was commenced in Supreme Court by Passage Island Estates regarding Lot 3. In March the order of foreclosure was set to be granted. No word at press time as to the outcome.

In January 1995 the Supreme Court agreed with 9 Island Petitioners that the condition of lot 51 constituted a nuisance. Madam Justice Boyd gave an Order that the owner must remove the debris on the property and not conduct any burning. A notice of appeal was filed but no other steps were taken. In February 1996, the Court of Appeal registry declared the appeal was "inactive" thereby preventing the appeal from proceeding without the Court's permission.

A request was filed by the owner to get permission to proceed and the Petitioners file to have the appeal dismissed as abandoned. The applications were set to be heard on March 18 but Madam Justice Southin adjourned them until May 6th.

On April 9th, the debris was barged away by the owner, in compliance with the 15 month old Order to do so. Subsequently, an agreement has been reached to abandon the appeal at the hearing on May 6th, thus concluding the hard fought and expensive saga.

Lot 51 was put up for sale by Delta Shelf in 1996 for \$150,000. As of the summer of 1997 it is still being advertised for sale.

## **PASSAGE ISLAND**

### **Legends**

There are many Passage Island Legends which have been proven false or are unlikely. Some of them even appeared in newspapers.

1. 1891 Picture of Keith Family was on South Bay (Legend from Major Matthews, actually it was West Bay)

1. J.C. Keith was a logger (Legend from Phil Matty, actually he was a banker and real estate speculator)

2. The Swangard's got married on Passage Island (Legend from Rick Speedie, actually they were married in Saskatoon)

3. Unity Bainbridge was married on Passage Island and used to paint shore life and used to bring food to the hermit. (Legend from Edna Knowlton, actually she was married on Knob Hill in San Francisco, her sister rowed her over to paint the hermit's portrait but did not bring food other than when she went to paint)

4. Thompson was a shipwright with Shackleton (Legend from Ken Slade who got it from the night watchman at the Yacht Club, no proof)

5. Thompson rowed his boat to P.I. (Legend from Phil Matty, actually a friend rowed him)

6. Van Sun, Nov 8, 1943. Thompson is 75 (he was 73)

7. Van News-Herald, Nov 8, 1943. Thompson is over 70 (he was 73)

8. Van, Feb 25, 1944, Thompson is 80 (he was 73)

9. Van Sun, Feb 25, 1944. Thompson is almost 80 (he was 73)

10. Van Province, Feb 25, 1944. Thompson is 80 (he was 73)

11. Van Sun, Feb 28, 1944. Thompson is 72 (he was 73)

12. Van Province, Mar 2, 1944. Thompson is 72 (he was 73)

13. Van Province, 1967, Thompson was 80 when he left (he was 73)

14. The Boy Scouts had a cabin on Passage Island (Told by former boy scout to Ken Slade, may be true)

15. The Morricks were married on Passage and used to bring food to the hermit. Mrs. Morrow's ashes were spread in the waters around Passage when she died in Vancouver while here on a trip from San Diego where they had their sailboat moored. He was manager of the PNE when he retired. (Legend from Edna Knowlton, may be true)

## **PASSAGE ISLAND**

### **Coincidences**

There are many Passage Island Coincidences which prove that truth is stranger than fiction.

On June 22 1899 the Hermit entered the Yukon

Anne Jane Keith has the same initials as August Jack Khahtsahlano

August Jack Khahtsahlano was born on Kits Point where the Hermit later lived.

On August 26, 1938. August Jack officially changed his name to August Jack Khahtsahlano.

The Hermit moved from Kits Point to Passage Island. So did Debbie and Drew.

The Hermit moved to Passage Island the same year that Anne Jane Keith died (1937)

The Hermit was committed to Essondale and later Sue Vandermeer worked there

Commissioner Bob who now works at the Woodlands Cemetery showed Ken the headstones. The very next day Ken talks to a storekeeper in Steveston who said Bob had owned the store next to him. Two weeks later Debbie learns that her father knows Bob.

Mary Isabella Keith lived at 1238 Thurlow in Hampton Court, Ken and Samantha live at Hampton Place

Ken and Sam were driving home and passed the new Hermit Books store.

The Hermit's houses were burned down three times. This also happened to Malcolm Lowry who lived at Dollerton, also owned by the Keith Family. Malcolm Lowry died in 1957, Mary Isabella Keith in 1958.

X-files is filmed where the Hermit is buried.

Unity Bainbridge painted a picture of the squatters on the Kitsilano Indian Reserve and later painted a portrait of the hermit on Passage Island.

On July 23, 1997 Ken White went over to the West Vancouver Archives to see if there was any information on Passage Island. There was none but by coincidence at exactly the same time, Bill Kimmett, the author of the 1995 Passage Island article in Cottage Magazine was there doing research on another topic.

## **PASSAGE ISLAND Glossary**

Passage Islanders have their own definitions, names, slang for places, pets, and things and some are unfamiliar to Mainlanders. The most common ones are provided here:

### ***Things Named after People***

Barry and Sylvia - Lot 35

Baxter House - Lot 39

Bill and Liz - Lot 14

Bob's Gangway - Lot 52

The Boy's House - Lot 12

Bradbury House - Lot 17

Bruce's - Fisherman's Cove Esso Barge

Buff Allen's Lot - Lot 18

Cathy and Eric - Lot 44

Colin's Septic Field - First Field on the trail

Dave Buck's Lot - Lot 22

Debbie and Drew - Lot 50

Dorothy's Dock - Gangway and Float on Lot 33

Ed's Island - Lot 61

Eleanor's House - Lot 2

Grant's House - Lot 17

Hermit's House - used to be on Lot 58

Hermit's Wall - rocks moved by hermit

Hermit's Well - remains on Lot 58

Hooper House - Lot 35

Jorg and Mika - Lot 26

Jorg's Easement - Lot 25

Jorg's Steps - 80 steps leading to house

Juhan and Haely - Lot 40

Ken Slade's House - Lot 60

Knowlton's House - Lot 15

Kuun's House - Lot 46

Matty's Gangway - Lot 56

McKinnon House - Lot 30

McPhee House - Lot 41

Mulder's House - Lot 5

Neil's Hut - Lot 52

Phil and Julie - Lot 56

Rick and Bonnie - Lot 32

Sam and Ken - Lot 19

Speedie's Bar and Grill - Lot 32

Tom's House - Lot 41

Sinclare House - Lot 50

Vera's House - Lot 51

Wlodek's House = Lot 31

Wolfgang and Barbara - Lot 30



## ***Locations***

Sunrise Lane - Trail Leading to Eleanor's Lot 2

Arbutus Walk - Trail Leading to Dorothy's Lot 33

Bird Island - Lot 61

Commercial Zone - Lot 16

Derelict House - Lot 51

East Bay - Beach on East Side (North Steps)

Essondale - Mental Hospital where Hermit went

Frisbee Field - Intersection of trails by Notice Board

North Steps - Concrete Steps on East Bay

The Road - Main trail

Seagull Island - Lot 61

Snake Island - old name for Passage Island

South Bay - Beach on South End

Stairway to Heaven - Lot 54

The Trail - Main Road

West Bay - Beach on West side

Wet Spot - On trail between Lot 16 and Lot 34 that is always wet

## ***Signs***

Baxter's Landing - Lot 39

Castaways - Lot 44

Go Away - Lot 41 (now Lot 44)

Hearts Content - Lot 19

Information - Frisbee Field

Z. K. K. Kuun - Lot 46

Molln - Lot 25

Ragged Ass Road - Lot 19

Slades Folly - Lot 60

***Boats (Italics are former boats)***

Apodaca - Water Taxi to various islands

Appollo - Steve and Marja Harmer

Beluga - Wlodek Jankowski and Vivian Rosendahl

Bismarck - Jorg and Mika Helssen

Cormorant - Bowen Island Water Taxi

Dave's Fave - Chad Matty

Debie - Stephan Sonderhoff and Victor Senoner

Deka - Bruce's Water Taxi

Dolphin - Bruce's Water Taxi and rentals

*Donzi* - Phil and Julie Matty

Dusky Dolphin - Barry Payne

Eclipse - Jorg and Mika Helssen Sailboat

*Faery* - Drew and Debbie

*Grew* - Phil and Julie Matty

*Gwylan* - Eleanor Worman

Home Free - Drew White and Debbie Anderson

*Howe Sound Belle* - Phil and Julie Matty

Hydrophobia - Eric Norlin and Cathy Mari

Hymax - Ed Vernon

*Kleewyck* - Helga and Emil Bolleter

Liberty - Phil and Julie Matty

*Melco* - Eleanor Worman

*Passage Harmony* - Wolfgang Strigel

*Passage Taisa* - Bill and Jan Mulder

*Pi-R-Square* - Phil and Julie Matty

Sandvik - Victor Senoner and Stephan Sonderhoff

Sea Truck - Cameron Rolfe

Sewell's Boat - Sewell's rental boat

Tidewater - Steve and Marja Harmer

Topper - Clay and Edna Knowlton

***Birds (Italics are former residents)***

Blackie - Samantha Macintyre

*Bobbin* - Phil and Julie Matty

Butt-Naked - Bill and Jan Mulder

Jake - Samantha Macintyre (Lot 19)

Pidge - Samantha Macintyre (Lot 19)

PIP(Passage Island Parrot) - Barry Payne and Sylvia Dalgish (Lot 35)

***Cats (Italics are former residents)***

*Husky* - Jennifer Mulder (Lot 5)

Judy - Drew White and Deb Anderson (Lot 50)

Madison - Kevin and Diane Roberts (Lot 54)

Miso - Cathy Mari and Eric Norlin (Lot 44)

*Pussy* - Hermit (Lot 58)

*Westerly* - Barry Payne (Lot 35) then Jennifer Mulder (Lot 5)

Wilson - Kevin and Diane Roberts (Lot 54)

Zachery - Beth and Bill Mckinnon (Lot 30)

***Dogs (Italics are former residents)***

Aja - Cathy Mari and Eric Norlin (Lot 44)

*Barney* - Phil and Julie Matty (Lot 56)

*Barney* - Bill and Liz Griffin (Lot 14)

Belle - Bob and Susan Vandermeer (Lot 52)

Blue - Bill and Liz Griffin (Lot 14)

Danger Dawg - Ed Vernon (Lot 61)

*Digger* - Phil and Julie Matty (Lot 56)

*Gwen* - Tom Walters (Lot 41)

Janie - Drew White and Deb Anderson (Lot 50)

*Katie* - Phil and Julie Matty (Lot 56)

*Lancelot* - Tom Walters (Lot 41)

*Max von Passage Island* - Phil and Julie Matty (Lot 56)

Ossa - Juan and Haeley Lindau (Lot 40)

Pewter - Ed Vernon (Lot 61)

Prince - Victor Senoner (Lot 12)

Rambo - Barry Payne and Sylvia Dalgish (Lot 35)

Rex - Colin Turner (Lot 28) then Chad Matty (Lot 56)

Rocky - Barry Payne and Sylvia Dalgish (Lot 35)

*Queenie* - Drew White and Deb Anderson (Lot 50)

*Shamma* - Ken Slade (Lot 60)

Sheena - Eleanor Worman (Lot 2)

*Snowy* - Traute and Helmer Scholtz (Lot 24)

Squamish - Drew White and Deb Anderson (Lot 50)

Stormy - Wlodek Jankowski and Vivian Rosendahl (Lot 31)

Talla - Martina Chovancova (Lot 12)

*Tammy* - Clay and Edna Knowlton (Lot 15)

*Theo* - Bill and Liz Griffin (Lot 14)

*Toki* - Bill and Beth McKinnon (Lot 30)

Zoe - Juhan and Haeley Lindau (Lot 40)

### ***Things***

The Chain - Lot 22

Cistern - Stores Water

Notice Board - Frisbee Field

Panels - Solar Power

The Rope - Near Lot 58

Septic Field

Spring Chicken - Costume Used in 1994 PIHA meeting

Stanley - Lot 19

Suicide Rope Swing - Lot 39

Tile Bed - Septic Field

***Terminology***

Dorkhead - idiot

Gorby - Tourist

Hoogie - anything at all

Islander - Us

Mainlander - Them

Newbie - A new islander

Skookum - excellent

Treated - Pressure Treated Lumber

Weekender - An islander who only comes out on weekends

## PASSAGE ISLAND

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