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Gabriola's wharves —Northumberland Channel

by Jenni Gehlbach



Green Wharf, December 19, 2011 after renovations.

RDN Regional Director Howard Houle

Gabriola (Green) Wharf

The first public wharf on Gabriola was built on the south side of the island at the Percy Anchorage in the Northumberland Channel, which is at the western entrance to False Narrows. It was known officially as the *Gabriola Wharf*, but islanders knew it as the *Big Wharf*, the *Government Wharf*, or

simply *The Wharf*. Names like *Centre Wharf* and *Green Wharf* came later.

Prior to government involvement, the roads connecting the south (east) and north (west) ends of Gabriola and the various private wharves were rough trails. In the 1870s, the scattered residents were seeking government money to improve them.

Already we read of different priorities being voiced for the two ends of the island, and can foresee the future divisions that would occur in how and where Gabriola's community facilities would be built.¹

The July 7 1875 edition of the *Nanaimo Free Press* wrote:

“Nearly all the settlers of Gabriola Island attended a meeting called by Mr. Fawcett, Government Agent, at Mr. McGuffie's residence, yesterday afternoon. The purpose of the meeting was to decide how the \$500 government grant for roads, etc. should be spent.

“It was duly moved, seconded, and carried that one half of the grant be expended at [the] west end and the other half at the east end. Mr. McLay was elected foreman for the west end and Mr. Martin² foreman for the east end of the Island. After the customary vote of thanks the meeting adjourned.”

The phrase “roads, etc.” must have also indicated wharves, because negotiations soon began about the location of a wharf suitable to serve all Gabriolans. Neil Aitken and Aula Bell suggest³ that an imminent provincial election may have helped speed things along and sitting member

¹ Nick Doe wrote in private correspondence: “The size and geography of the island made it ideally suited for two of everything, but the total population made it suited for only one of everything. A typical example is the decades-long controversy over the site of the school.”

² This was probably Jonathon Martin (born in 1831) who in 1884 had the NE ¼ of Section 2; John Martin had the SE ¼ of Section 2; A. Martin owned the SW ¼ and part of the SE ¼ of Section 1; Aaron Martin held the SW ¼ of Section 15 (along what is now called “the tunnel”); and Thomas Martin owned the SW ¼ of Section 4—the southeast shore of Degnen Bay. He was Jonathon's oldest son and he died in the Wellington Mine explosion in 1887.

³ In *Gabriola Island Place Names* published in 1996 by Reflections Publisher; p.38.

David W. Gordon may have initiated the wharf's construction.

Gabriola Wharf—1878

On Saturday, May 4, 1878, the *Nanaimo Free Press* reported:

GABRIOLA ISLAND WHARF

“Mr. Mahood, C.E., proceeded to this island on Wednesday and examined three places for the proposed public wharf. The particulars will be sent to the Lands and Works Department, which will decide upon the site. The construction of this wharf will be a great boon to the settlers, as it will enable them to get their products to market.”

On May 22, the Land and Works Department invited tenders “up to June 3rd for the construction of a wharf on Gabriola Island at the upper end of False Narrows, abreast of Dodd Narrows”.

The location of the wharf had no doubt been an attempt to reconcile the conflicting needs of those at the south and north ends of the island, and the need to provide a convenient landing place for mail steamers travelling between Nanaimo and Victoria.

On June 12, 1878, a contract was signed between Forbes George Vernon, BC's Chief Commissioner of Public Works, and Alexander James McLellan of Nanaimo to:

“...find all plant, labour, and materials necessary to erect, build, make, repair, carry on, and complete a wharf on Gabriola Island... And will do and finish the said work in the manner set forth...on or before the thirtieth day of June AD 1878.”

McLellan with Alexander Mayer and Samuel Brightman⁴ posted a \$400 bond to guarantee that the work would be completed as promised, and on June 26, the *Nanaimo*

⁴ In the 1881 Nanaimo area census, Samuel Brightman was listed as a 30-year-old butcher. The only Mayer listed is 31-year-old salesman called Adolph. McLellan is not listed.

Free Press reported: “Today, Mr. McLellan will complete the erection of the Gabriola Wharf. This is energetic work.”

But Gabriolans are rarely satisfied by even such prompt accomplishments, especially if the decisions are arguably ill considered and the results shoddy. The road down to the new wharf was steep and treacherous. Worse, already on October 11, 1879, we read in the *Nanaimo Free Press* that, “the wharf...is reported to be in a very dilapidated condition”. This was a very rapid deterioration, and on October 25, a long, sarcastic letter to the editor almost certainly written by James McLay with the pseudonym COM read:

A FEW WORDS ABOUT GABRIOLA

“There seems to be a considerable amount of unappreciated and perhaps unmerited affection lavished for some time back on the settlers of Gabriola, and especially, in this case, with those on the north end of the island. The kindness at present being forced upon them is in the shape of a road—a grand, new and picturesque road—leading them several miles out of their usual course in reaching Nanaimo, their market.

“In fact, it is meant to lead them half way back down the island to that wharf—the pet wharf—which, according to some accounts, is already shaky about the knee-joints. Some people have the temerity to say, ‘That wharf has never been of any service nor ever will’.

“Well, this is scarcely correct, as I am almost certain there has been one man landed there, from the mail steamer too. But then, there is no use denying the fact that the consequences to that man were rather bad. He was sorry afterwards for being landed there.

“And by the way, there is another service that the said wharf must get credit for. This is the third year that it has been the means of gobbling up all the money appropriated for the island's roads.

“But to return to those blessed people on the north of the island (Blessed, I say, for it is for them principally, and with a fatherly eye for their benefit, that all that money has been and is being expended in that quarter). They are perfectly satisfied with their present mode of entrance and exits to and from their homes, and apparently, all they wish for was for a little of that money to be put upon their present roads where they would have derived some benefit from it. But no, the higher powers knew better what was good for their pet children, than they did themselves. And no doubt, after deliberating long and seriously over the matter, they came to the conclusion that their much esteemed people, for good of their health, must have more exercise, and they likely said amongst themselves, ‘for this consideration we will make them a much longer and beautiful, precipitous road’.

“But, Mr. Editor, there might have been more done in that line than what is projected. I am convinced that there could have been found a more lengthy and circuitous route for them to reach market by. Of course, there would have been less of the mountainous sublimity about it than adorns the selected route. But then, what one had in stupendous grandeur might have been more than counterbalanced in the other by distance.”

How we Gabriolans have always loved to write cantankerous letters to the editor.

In this period, the wharf was referred to in government documents and the newspapers simply as the “Gabriola Wharf”. Both the wharf and the road to it continued to be judged inadequate. On September 15, 1880, the *Nanaimo Free Press* reported:

“A meeting of the settlers of Gabriola Island was held at the wharf on Saturday. M. Bray Esq., Government Agent was present.

“It was agreed that a trail be cut to the wharf and the balance of the appropriations divided between the upper and lower ends of the island. Mr. Dignan [Degnen] for the lower

end and Mr. Penberthy [Pemberthy-White] for the upper end, to superintend the expenditure of the money.”

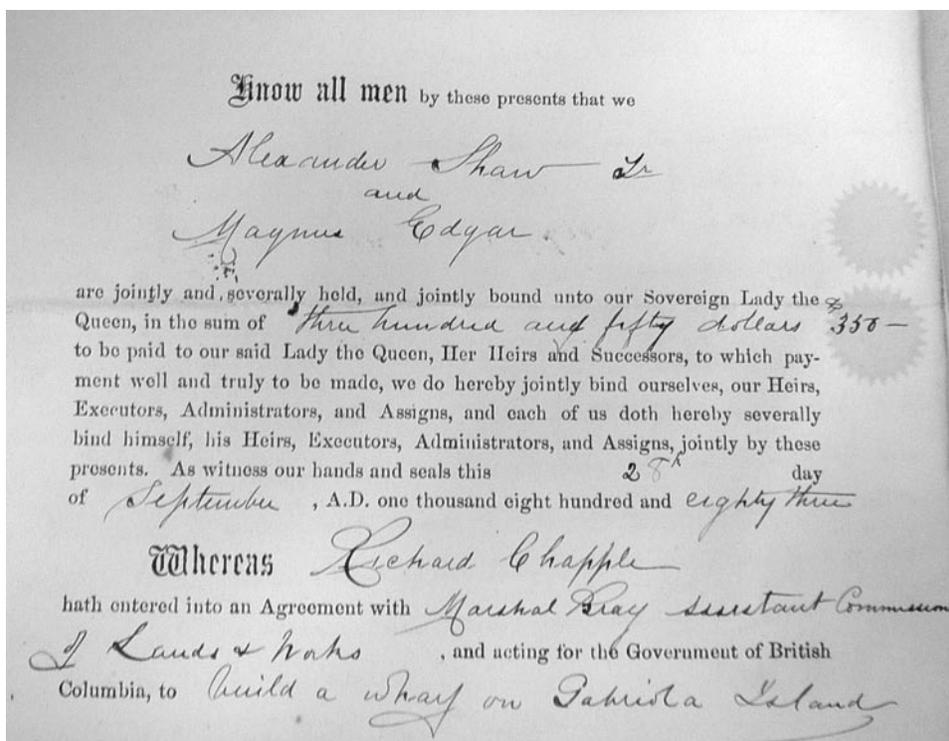
Five months later, on February 23, 1881, a Public Works report for Nanaimo District said that: “The road and trails from the wharf to the upper end of Gabriola Island have been repaired, and new bridges and culverts made....”

Gabriola Wharf—1883

Serious complaints continued about the wharf's state of repair and location for a couple more years, and on September 5, 1883, the *Nanaimo Free Press* reported:

“Mr. Raybould, M.P.P., Mr. Bray (Asst. Commissioner of Lands and Works) and Mr. S. Price (Road Superintendent) visited Gabriola Wharf on Saturday in the steamer *Nellie Taylor*. They chose as the site for the proposed new wharf, a spot about 200 yards nearer this city than the present location. By this change a better wharf can be constructed and an approach easily made.”

Several tenders for the construction of the proposed wharf were sent to Victoria for consideration, including the lowest bid by



Richard Chapple who lived along False Narrows was the successful bidder for the 2nd attempt at building a wharf at the Green Wharf site in 1883. Said to have been the lowest bidder, but one wonders whether the fact that he was an islander with a vested interest in doing a good job was a factor. The first wharf built by off-islanders in a couple of weeks was reported to be “very dilapidated” and “shaky about the knee-joints” not much more than a year after being constructed in 1878.

BC Archives

Gabriolan, Richard Chapple, which was accepted.

The contract between Bray and Chapple was signed on September 22, and on September 25, Alexander Shaw and Magnus Edgar⁵ posted a \$350 bond “unto our Sovereign Lady the Queen” that:

“...Richard Chapple would fulfil the obligation of his agreement with Marshall Bray...acting for the Government of British Columbia, to build a wharf on Gabriola

⁵ The bond document was witnessed by Solomon D. Levi and John Edgar. The only Levi listed in the 1881 census was 51-year-old Simon D. Levi, a Nanaimo merchant. In 1881, John Edgar was listed as the 17-year-old farmer son of 55-year-old Magnus Edgar.

Island in accordance with Agreement and Specification thereunto annexed....”

The wharf was quickly built in its new location—well before the specified completion date of November 15.

It is interesting to read the other specifications of the building contract—for one thing, it was to be “300 yards west of the present one”, not 200 yards as reported in the newspaper. It actually ended up being 260 yards [0.24 km] west, with the terrain calling the shots. The builder was instructed to re-use any good timbers and planks from the existing wharf and told where and how to pile the unused timbers. The dimensions of the approach ramp and wharf, of the float, pilings, stringers, and caps were all precisely specified, as were the bolt dimensions and the number of spikes to be driven at various connection points. The height above low water was to be 18 feet. So, Gabriola would have a sturdy new wharf suitable for steamers.

On May 17, 1884, *The Victoria Times Colonist* carried an invitation from E.H. Fletcher, Acting Inspector at the Victoria Post Office, to submit tenders by June 5 for a contract “for the conveyance of Her Majesty’s Mails”. The mail was to be carried three times a week each way between Nanaimo and Victoria, calling at North Saanich, Cowichan, Maple Bay, Burgoyne Bay, Salt Spring Island, Chemainus, and Gabriola Island.

The contract was awarded to the *Sydney and Nanaimo Transportation Company*.

However, June Harrison, in her indispensable book on Gabriola’s history, writes:⁶

“On October 1, 1884, Alexander Shaw Sr. signed a contract with the Government for

the mail service, and the contract was written as the ‘*Gabriola Island and Wharf*’ service... Alexander Shaw would row to Nanaimo to obtain whatever packages there were and bring them safely to the Island. Of course, the northern end of Gabriola looked after its own mail, and later Bob Hoggan, with his boat brought the post to the north.”

This story seems odd because when the new wharf at the entrance to False Narrows was built, steamboats were in use, and the *Sydney & Nanaimo Transportation Co.* had been contracted to call at Gabriola. Perhaps Shaw’s role was simply to collect and distribute the mail from False Narrows—I do not know.

The relocated wharf quickly developed its own troubles because marine worms rapidly attacked its piles. Only three years after its construction, on August 25, 1886, we read:

“Our attention has been drawn to the fact that the Gabriola Wharf is greatly in need of some new fender piles and, if left in its present state, will undoubtedly become a wreck during the coming winter. If such is the case, the government officials should see that the wharf is made secure at once. It is a great convenience to the settlers, and quite a sum of public money has been expended in making a road thereto. We feel certain that the government will not allow the wharf to be jeopardized for the sake of the slight expense of a few piles.”

Early in September,⁷ the SS *Amelia* brought a pile driver over to the island, and the *Nanaimo Free Press* reported on September 29 that Chapple and McGuffie had completed the repairs.

Things were looking well for the hard-working preemptor McGuffie—the Vancouver Coal Company put a bore down the following June on his land near

⁶ June Lewis-Harrison, *The People of Gabriola*, 1982, pp.226–7.

⁷ See also the *Nanaimo Free Press*, August 28 & September 4, 1886.

Brickyard Beach, only a mile south of this new wharf. In an interesting take on tourism, the following summer, we read:⁸

EXCURSION TO GABRIOLA

“The steamer *R. Dunsmuir*, Captain Rogers, made an excursion trip to Gabriola Island on Wednesday afternoon with quite a number of our citizens. After a pleasant run to the wharf, the excursionists landed and walked into the lower settlement.

“The Vancouver Coal Company's drill was visited, and the working of the power drill was much admired. The bore is in charge of Mr. John Hamilton and is making rapid progress.

“The settlers of Gabriola courteously received the excursionists and pointed out to them the natural beauties of Gabriola Isle and expatiated on the future of that section when the diamond drill had proved that a valuable seam of “dusky diamonds” underlaid their island, which stands as a protecting fortress to Nanaimo.

“The excursionists returned in the gloaming, well pleased with their trip.”

But alas, despite going down nearly 2000 feet, no coal was found.

The final 1887 Nanaimo newspaper report about the second wharf on False Narrows indicated continuing dissatisfaction with the road to the wharf. On August 31, it reported:

“A few days ago a meeting of the settlers of Gabriola was held to decide how the road money should be expended. Messrs. G. Thomson, M.P.P., M. Bray, Government Agent, and Mr. Bate, Assessor and Collector, were present from this city.

“It was decided to expend the money between the two ends of the island, a portion being set apart to widen the road at the head of the wharf. Mr. Pemberthy was appointed foreman for the upper end and Mr. Chapple

at the lower end. A committee of three settlers for each end was appointed to arrange for the expenditure of the money.”

Still, clearly the wharf was in regular use, because a timetable⁹ from the *People's Steam Navigation Company* that took effect July 31, 1888, says that the SS *Amelia* was scheduled to leave Victoria on Wednesdays at 7:00 a.m. bound for Comox, calling at Saanich, Bourgoyne Bay, Vesuvius Bay, Chemainus, Gabriola Island, Nanaimo, and Denman Island, returning via the same ports of call at 2:00 p.m.

The wharf continued in regular use by Gabriolans, Mudge Islanders, and by visitors. The *Nanaimo Free Press* reported on July 29, 1889:

A MAGNIFICENT TIME!

had by the ‘Bradfords’ yesterday at Gabriola

“Yesterday morning a party, numbering twenty-three, boarded the fine yacht *Rover* shortly before nine o'clock and started for Gabriola Island to play a friendly game of baseball with the ‘Big Island’ boys. The wind was very light and hardly any headway was made until after the point of Protection Island was rounded when a stiff breeze was encountered from the gulf.

“The trip from here to the wharf was greatly enjoyed by all the party, with the exception of one or two who commenced to feel ‘squamous’ from the pitching of the yacht. One timid member of the party, as the spray dashed over the yacht's bows, gave expression to his nervousness. But, with Captain Naughton and Skipper Geo. Kennedy in charge, no danger was apprehended by the other members.

“Just before reaching the wharf the steamer *Empire* was passed, which had come through Dodd's Narrows, and, in response to three hearty cheers by the baseballists, Captain

⁸ *Nanaimo Free Press*, July 16, 1887.

⁹ Published in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* on July 30, 1888.

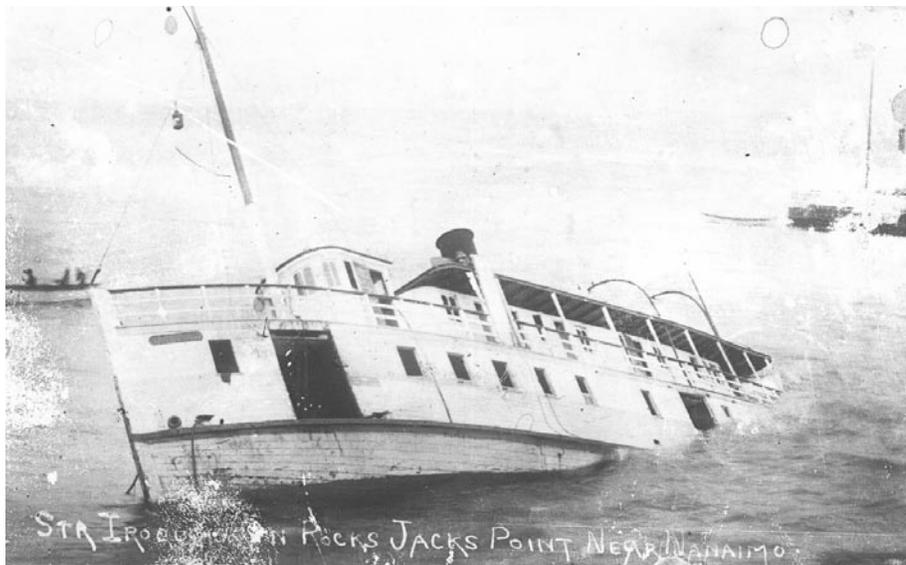
Butier responded by blowing the steamer's whistle.

"The wharf was reached at 10:30 o'clock, and wagons were in waiting to convey the party to the scene of the coming conflict, some four miles distance. Arriving at Jim Martin's ranch, a halt was made and his liberality was displayed by the generous manner in which he served pies, crackers, cakes, milk, etc. to the now hungry party...

"...The home trip was made in the evening by way of Bigg's Portage,¹⁰ the party arriving home at 9:30 o'clock. The party were all loud in their praises at the hospitable manner in which they had been treated by one and all of those with whom they came in contact."

The wharf's dominant role in Gabriola's maritime infrastructure faded in 1891, when a new government-funded wharf was built at Rocky (later Descanso) Bay. The False Narrows wharf could no longer simply be called "Gabriola Wharf", but it remained in service and in need of regular maintenance.

¹⁰ The *Nanaimo Free Press* of November 3, 1888 reported that Mr. Thomas McGuffie, on contract to the Dominion Government, was in charge of cutting a boat canal through what was locally known as Bigg's Portage. The purpose was to save the residents of Gabriola and adjacent islands the trip around windy Jack Point, *en route* to Nanaimo. June Harrison wrote (pp.198–9) that Bigg's Portage was first cut in 1883, but was too shallow for the larger boats, and was enlarged in 1888.



SS *Iroquois* foundering near Jack Point in 1910.

Image courtesy of Sidney Museum Archives, photograph 995.11.1

Green Wharf in the early-20th century

The wharf at False Narrows near Dodd Narrows was clearly marked on a chart made by Capt. Parry in 1904 during a British naval survey of the area, and for the first decade of the twentieth century, a reliable steamer service used the wharf on its mail run between Victoria and Nanaimo via the Gulf Islands.

The SS *Iroquois*, built for the purpose, was 82-feet long and capable of carrying 100 tons of passengers and freight and of travelling at 12 knots. A 1903 timetable for the *Sidney and Nanaimo Transportation Co.* has the SS *Iroquois* connecting efficiently at Sidney with the *Victoria and Sidney Railway* train from Victoria. It then headed for Nanaimo on Mondays and Thursdays, making seven other stops, including Gabriola.

On Tuesday and Friday, it ran back to Victoria from Nanaimo. June Harrison mentions that the SS *Iroquois* was popular on Gabriola in part because of her well-

stocked bar when she arrived at the Big Wharf.¹¹

The SS *Iroquois* has a fairly dramatic history. In 1910, it foundered on the rocks near Jack Point at the entrance to Nanaimo Harbour so that its stern was almost completely submerged. Surprisingly this accident caused little damage and she was soon back in service. But on April 11, 1911, the SS *Iroquois* did not fare so well. She sank for good off Sidney in a strong southeaster, losing all her cargo, including 20 cases of pickled pigs' tails, her coal ballast, and, tragically, 21 of her passengers, who were unlisted.

Why Green?

Within living memory, Gabriolans and Mudge Islanders have always called the landing in the Northumberland Channel, "Green Wharf" or "Green's Landing". Local historians have been puzzled by where and when this name originated because no Greens are listed on Gabriola or Mudge between 1881 and 1911, the name does not appear on censuses or voters' lists, and there have been no prominent Greens in the area since.

The most likely explanation¹² for the wharf's name is that it took the name of the man who was the province's Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works just after

¹¹ Harrison 1982, p.200.

¹² Another possible source for Green Wharf's name arose from a note on the history of the North School in the *Three Schools Reunion* Project (ed. Peggy Lewis Imredy, August 4, 1984, p.7): "...the present school was built in the summer of 1927 by Mr. Green, a contractor of Nanaimo". The Nanaimo Community Archives has a list of building permits issued by the city to a contractor James Green between April 1927 and 1934. His business address was 371 Franklyn Street. Possibly James Green was also contracted to refurbish the Gabriola Wharf, giving his name to it, but I have found no evidence to support that conjecture.

the turn of the century: Robert (Bob) Francis Green (1861–1946). In the report on the Legislative Assembly in *The Victoria Daily Colonist* on Saturday December 12, 1903, we read that the Hon. R.F. Green (Conservative) had to answer a question from Mr. Paterson (Liberal, Gulf Islands):

"What proportion of the moneys appropriated for roads, streets, and bridges in South Nanaimo was spent on Gabriola Island each year since 1900, inclusive?" The reply was:

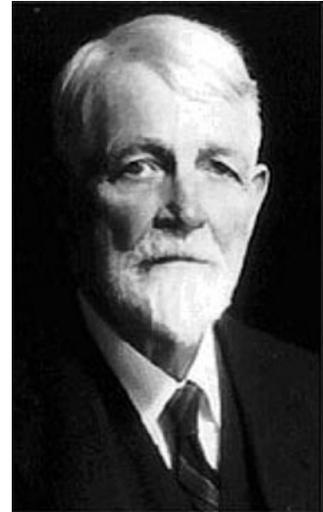
1900/1	456.75
1901/2	536.25
1902/3	5.00
1903/4	223.25

The follow-up question was:

"Were instructions, written or verbal, given to anyone other than the authorized superintendent regarding road work on Gabriola Island in the month of September 1903?"

Green's brief reply was:

"Government Agent, by public works engineer, to set aside \$500.00 for roads on Gabriola Island to be taken from the district vote; arrangements to be made by department regarding foreman."



R.F. Green, Mayor of Kaslo, Conservative MLA, MP, and Senator was possibly responsible for authorizing funding for repairs to the wharf in the Northumberland Channel.

Patricia Williams, the Canadian Encyclopedia

The election, which was the first provincial election to involve organized political parties, was held on October 3, 1903, so it sounds like there was a nasty suspicion that the pro-government candidates had been handing out pre-election goodies—my, oh my!

In any case, Gabriolans didn't take the bait, if that is what it was, and elected an opposition member. It was also reported that the Hon R.F. Green had recently visited Ottawa on provincial business, and Montréal "...as the guest of the Harbor Commission and in the public interest".

The next month on January 28 1904, *The Victoria Colonist* reported from the Legislative Assembly:

"Mr. Patterson complained bitterly of the appropriation of \$2500 for roads, trails, and bridges for the Islands District. He wanted to know if the unspent vote for this district last year would be spent this year... He pointed out that Gabriola Island had been added to the Islands constituency, the old North Victoria district, and this made it much more difficult to deal with."

That edition of the paper also reported: "Mr. Oliver also criticized the Lands and Works Department, and asked that drastic reforms be initiated there. He had heard that the working of that department needed radical revision." The report continued:

"Hon. Mr. Green asked the hon. member to have patience; the government had not yet had time to investigate everything in the department, but if Mr. Oliver would wait a year, the government would then be glad to hear his views...."

So, R.F. Green appears to have been fairly new to his post and was about to shake it up a bit.

Green Wharf since the 1920s

Frank Bond reported¹³ that the wharf on False Narrows had been managed by Public Works Canada since 1919. Government documents¹⁴ show that responsibility for this wharf at "Gabriola Centre" was transferred in 1929 to the Department of Marine and Fisheries. That year the traffic at the wharf was reported to be "[a] gasoline passenger and freight launch three times a week and other private launches".

An aerial photograph from 1932, clearly shows the wharf and the road leading down to it. The wharf was reported to be in fair or good condition until 1934, when a few planks were replaced and in 1936, it was deemed in good condition. The traffic reported in 1935 was "a small passenger boat six times a week, tow boats, and launches".

But by 1937, the annual Department of Marine report said the structure was in dangerous condition and no regular traffic was using it. Despite this, letters were exchanged about the possible appointment of a wharfinger to be paid from tolls levied, but nothing came of it.

Although government reports in 1942 and 1945 said it was in bad condition and had "evidently not been used for some time", a Davenport map of the Nanaimo-Alberni district still had a wharf marked (WH) at this location after its 1946 revision. Clearly, it must have been renovated by 1947 as government correspondence in March of that year about the wharf (calling it Gabriola West Wharf) states that its superstructure had been renewed, the float was new, and it was being used by fishermen, local

¹³ In the July 28, 1995 edition of *The Gabriola Sounder*.

¹⁴ Stated in an April 16, 1959 letter from the Department of Public Works in Ottawa to the Minister of Marine and Fisheries Services.

residents, pleasure craft, and vessels waiting for the tide in Dodd Narrows. The road to the wharf however was noted as needing repairs.

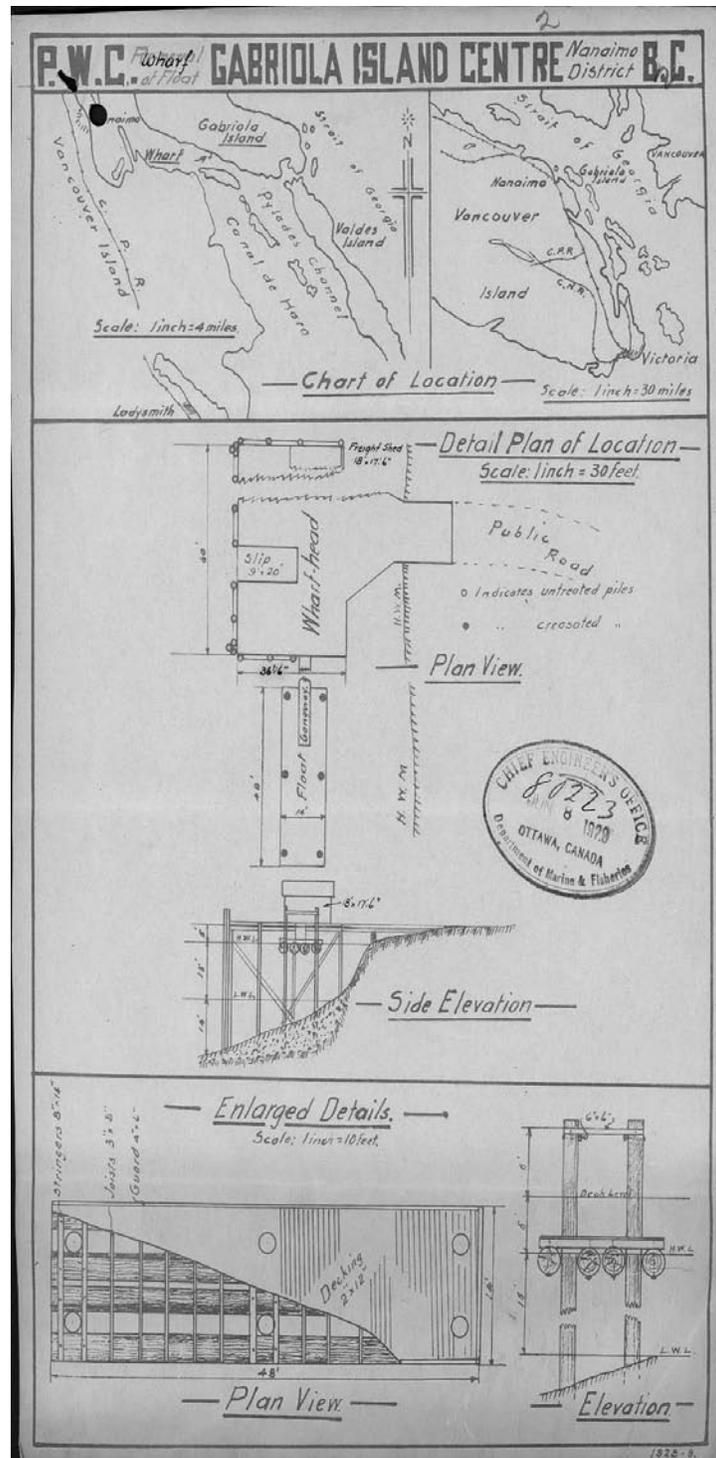
Frank Bond wrote that Public Works Canada replaced Green Wharf's deteriorating docks and ramp again in 1950. Bond added: "In 1954, they tried to hand responsibility of the facility to the province, but within months it reverted back to the federal government."

The Green Wharf Preservation Society¹⁵ records on their notice at the wharf that Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) took over Green Wharf on September 17, 1954. Frank Hackwood told me he used to fish in False Narrows in the 1950s and 60s and remembers the wharf with its red, not green, railings, and says that in those days it had a winch and a sufferance shed nearby for temporarily storing cargo in transit.

The report in 1969 by the Department of Transport stated:

"Guardrails require painting to preserve wood. Large log "hung up" between Approach bearing piles. Guardrails on gangway are loose (bolts need tightening). Floats will require renewal in near future."

Responsibility for the wharf's upkeep has remained contentious.



Public Works Canada Plan of the Centre Wharf (Green Wharf) in Dept. of Marine & Fisheries files. The plan is dated September 1928.

¹⁵ The Green Wharf Preservation Society is a non-profit, registered society dedicated to keeping this essential access.

Bond was writing about Green Wharf in 1995 because the Federal Government was again trying to rid itself of responsibility for the wharf, but it was up to them to find an agency willing to accept that responsibility. Despite occasionally having used the wharf in emergencies, BC Ferries had no interest in taking it on.

The province's Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks could manage BC foreshore but had no mandate to manage facilities, so would need the wharf removed unless an agency could be found to manage it. Mudge Islanders had been trying to save the wharf and had petitioned the Regional District of Nanaimo in May 1992 as soon as they learned the Federal Government wished to close it. The Preservation Society's notice continues:

“Through a water lease with BC Lands, PWGSC improved the wharf and maintained it until 1988. By that time BC Ferry service and other Gabriola wharves reduced the need for Green Wharf and it had begun to deteriorate. But because of development of subdivisions on Mudge Island, the need for access between Mudge and Gabriola began to increase.

“PWGSC tried to divest itself of the wharf but public protests in the '90s saved it from demolition. Then the regional District of Nanaimo agreed to manage the wharf through a sub-lease with PWGSC, with volunteer support from Green Wharf Preservation Society. The Society performed much of the volunteer labour, replacing the deteriorating government float, replacing decking, and clearing hazardous debris such as deadheads, etc.”

Green Wharf is still in use at the time of writing (2011) and its location, accessibility, and maintenance are still controversial. On March 1, 2010, *The Gabriola Sounder* had a lengthy article about whether the Regional

District of Nanaimo (RDN) could and should own and operate the wharf:

“At its latest regular meeting in Nanaimo, the Regional District Board has directed staff to move forward with the application to take on the ownership of Green's Landing, commonly known as Green Wharf.

“Should the application be successful, Gabriolans will likely be asked at some point in the next fiscal year to decide on paying an additional \$4.10 per \$100,000 on taxes to cover the cost of ownership.

“Carol Mason, Chief Administrative Officer for the RDN, explained: ‘In order for the RDN to consider looking after it, we would need to acquire the water lot that the wharf is located on. In addition, we would need to review our authority to operate a wharf service.’

“Carol noted that: ‘the RDN already has a bylaw in place to operate the Emergency Wharf on Gabriola, at a minimal cost, but that Green Wharf would be considerably more expensive to operate. That bylaw would need to be amended to allow the RDN to take on the Green Wharf. Two steps are recommended by staff.

1. Negotiating with the province to see if the RDN can buy the wharf;
2. Bring back a bylaw amendment to the existing bylaw that looks at what it might cost to operate the wharf.’

“...Members of the Board asked about the road used to access the wharf ... [the] General Manager of Transit and Solid Waste Services said: ‘The upland owners have recently ... indicated that they do not support the location of the wharf and the use of their land to access the facility. If the Province continues to make access requirements as a condition of their approval, the process for the RDN to gain control of the wharf will need to include a negotiation to settle this issue with the landowner.’

“...Gisele [Rudischer] said: ‘I just want to point out that this wharf is really important

because it is the wharf that Mudge and DeCourcy islanders use when they have an emergency. I also want to point out, the reason Gabriolans should be interested in taking this on is because when BC Ferries repairs the dock on Gabriola, this is the dock used while it is being repaired.'

"... a survey done of the facility in 2008... indicated there will need to be ongoing major repairs...new floats and a new gangway will be needed soon and...repairs to the major structural components in the next 5 to 10 years could cost from \$75 000 to \$125 000.

"To cover the regular operation costs and to create a reserve to cover the major repair expenses, the RDN staff estimate that between \$40 000 and \$50 000 a year would be needed. This would be in addition to the \$5360 that is currently collected from Area B taxes to pay for the Descanso Bay Emergency Wharf...."

It seems little has changed since the late 1870s except that costs have gone up.

In the following year (2011), discontent was particularly focussed on road access to Green Wharf. On July 25, *The Flying Shingle* reported that PWGSC wanted to divest itself of the wharf but were not willing to pay both to dismantle the current one and to build a new one. They are spending "about \$150 000" to improve the current wharf, leaving road access as is. But Malcolm James claims that his family has been patient "for over thirty years", and that Wharf Road has encroached on his land by "up to 30 feet". He claims the road destabilises the slope, and they are not willing to allow any more realignments of the road on their property. Needing to re-assert his family's ownership of the land, he has erected warning signs that wharf users parking alongside the road where it crosses his property could be towed.

The controversy continued....

[EDITOR: Wharf Road, connecting South Road to the federal dock, Green Wharf, was secured by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure as a public road in 2012.

MOTI in a letter to the Green Wharf Preservation Society noted that, "while [making the road a public road] ensures the legal standing of the roadway, what has not changed is the parking situation. Parking is still restricted to the uphill half of Wharf Road, including the parking area built up by the ministry at the Wharf and South roads junction". MOTI however also noted that the ministry appreciates that access to Green Wharf is very important as the wharf has provided Mudge Island residents with water access from Gabriola Island to Mudge Island for several decades.]

Coats Wharf—1971

The Coats family has a significant private wharf a kilometre or so west of Green Wharf, opposite Dodd Narrows, nestled amongst the log booms at the foot of the sandstone cliffs below Hoggan Lake. A concrete boat ramp is just north of the dock, and both are well used, not just by the Coats family. When the ferry was unavailable for emergency medical transportation to Nanaimo, the Gabriola ambulance often had to use the long rough road down to Coats Wharf before the official emergency dock was built in Descanso Bay.

This wharf is near the waterfall where the brothers David and William Hoggan first made landing by canoe in the 1860s when they explored Gabriola.¹⁶ They preempted the land around what became Hoggan Lake, blasted the outlet to lower the lake's level and to create more arable land. Their brother Alexander Hoggan and his family joined them on Gabriola in 1873.

¹⁶ The stories of the Hoggan pioneers and Bill Coats on Gabriola are in *SHALE* 19, November 2008.

The family worked hard and had considerable success—on May 9, 1874, the *Nanaimo Free Press* wrote about Gabriola:

“Of the settlers, the older ones, such as Messrs. Hoggan, have done the most work. Their dwelling house, garden, barn, and buildings are models of neatness, comfort and good workmanship. They are on the borders of a lake which they have lowered considerably.”

David and William Hoggan died without children, and Alexander's family had settled near Descanso Bay.

Bill Coats, who came to Gabriola in 1912, is best known for his store at Descanso Bay near the Farmers Landing, and for owning the land on which the millstone quarry operated in the early 1930s. The last Gabriola land that enterprising Bill Coats bought (in the 1930s) was the land preempted by William and David Hoggan, though Bill never lived there himself.

Eventually, Bill's son Clyde built his family

home there overlooking the lake, cleaned the lake out because it had become clogged with hunters' debris, and he still generates electricity from the waterfall to feed into the grid.

A 1968 aerial photo shows a rough road angling down among the trees and a docking area where Coats Wharf is today. Clyde told me he blasted that road out and that he put the wharf in when he was about thirty years old—around 1971. ♦

[EDITOR: This is the second of six articles on Gabriola's wharves by Jenni Gehlbach.]



Coats wharf and its log-boom environs in 2003.

Hoggan Lake is in the top righthand corner.

Google Earth