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References:

Gehlbach J., The origins of quarrying for sandstone on Gabriola, *SHALE* 19, pp.3–10, Nov. 2008

Gehlbach J., Gabriola's dimension-stone quarry, *SHALE* 19, pp.11–24, Nov. 2008

Gehlbach J., Gabriola's millstone quarry, *SHALE* 19, pp.25–41, Nov. 2008

Gehlbach J., Gabriolans and the sandstone quarries, *SHALE* 19, pp.42–52, Nov. 2008

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Gabriola's sandstone quarry —the earliest days

by Jenni Gehlbach

When my histories of Gabriola's sandstone quarries and the people associated with them were published in *SHALE* 19 there remained some little mysteries—gaps in the record that tantalized and frustrated me. It is clear from the several public buildings that are known to have used Gabriola sandstone that quarrying was active on the island in the 1890s, but I was left wondering who had first publicly recorded an interest in Gabriola's good sandstone; when precisely the quarrying started on Gabriola rather than on Newcastle Island; what the terms of the lease were for quarrying on John Canessa's land; and who was organizing the quarrying before the *Vancouver Granite Company* bought the land in 1902. Also, I had previously found no specific record of the use of Gabriola's sandstone for Vancouver buildings after 1904 despite an account of the still-working quarry around 1910.¹

The University of Victoria recently published an on-line, searchable database of all editions of the *Victoria Times Colonist* newspaper from 1858, then known as the *British Colonist*, to 1910.² Searching through these newspaper pages, I found a series of intriguing articles and advertisements that threw some light on these mysteries.

The commercial possibilities

The earliest reference I found to Gabriola's sandstone quarrying potential was in an 1867 report of "A Trip to Comox" aboard the steamer *Sir James Douglas* which carried "ten passengers, H.M.'s mails and about twenty tons of freight for the different settlements" between Victoria and Comox. The round trip took from Monday morning to Saturday afternoon.³ The unnamed reporter wrote:

After passing Dodd's Narrows, a magnificent wall of sandstone is to be seen on the right, extending for several miles along the banks of Gabriola Island and rising perpendicularly from the water's edge. The strata here are better defined and more regular than those observed on Salt Spring, and vary from three to twenty feet in thickness. An inexhaustible quarry of the finest sandstone is thus prepared for the future requirements of the colony.

Quarrying in the 1890s

No further comment specifically on Gabriola's sandstone occurred in the *Times Colonist* until 1895. We know that the Newcastle Island quarry started well before the one on Gabriola, and an 1890 advertisement indicates active quarrying there:⁴

¹ Hillma Holm Lenshaw, *The Gabriola Stone Quarry around 1910*, Gabriola Sounder, 1993.

² <http://britishcolonist.ca/advancedSearch.php>

³ *British Colonist*, p.2, April 29, 1867.

⁴ Advertisements in *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p.4, June 21, 1890, and p.2, November 4, 1893.

A NUMBER OF QUARRYMEN WANTED
Newcastle Quarry, Nanaimo.
Current wages paid.
Apply to A.R. Johnston Co.
Or R. Nightingale, Supt.

Quarrying companies sometimes seem to have formed *ad hoc* for specific contracts, and often it was not clear who exactly was quarrying sandstone on and around Vancouver Island, but another *Victoria Times Colonist* advertisement in 1893 announced an agent for a Vancouver firm run by “Keefer and Godden”:

GEO. McFARLAND
sole agent for KEEFER & GODDEN'S
Vancouver Granite and Sandstone
QUARRIES

ADDRESS P.O. BOX 764, VICTORIA, B.C.

This advertisement caught my eye because Hugh Forbes Keefer was the engineer who eventually became a major player in the *Vancouver Granite Company*, which was the company that operated the Gabriola quarry.⁵

In 1887, Vancouver, the terminus of the CPR and hence even today called “Terminal City”, had begun to grow very rapidly and business opportunities abounded. H.F. Keefer was listed in *Williams' Vancouver City Directory* in 1888 as a contractor with offices on Alexander Street and living on Westminster Avenue. By 1889, other members of Keefer's family had arrived, as had Donald McGillivray. The firm *Keefer and McGillivray, Contractors*, was listed as having offices at 118 Alexander Street, which was also the location of *Vancouver Waterworks*, whose Chief Engineer was G.A. Keefer.

The following year, John Gilbert Keefer joined them, and by 1891 he was listed as

the bookkeeper at *Keefer's Quarry*, North Arm, on Brunswick Street.⁶

H.C. Godden arrived in Vancouver in 1892. *Williams' Illustrated Official BC Directory* described him as a manufacturer with rooms at Manor House and as a bookkeeper for H.F. Keefer, the contractor listed at 122 Alexander. In 1893—the year of the newspaper ad. for their Victoria agent—H.C. Godden and H.F. Keefer were listed as the proprietors of *Vancouver Granite and Sandstone Quarries, Brick-making and Contractors*, at 122 Alexander Street. That year, John Keefer was listed as the manager of *Keefer's Brickyard* on North Arm and similar listings occurred through 1895.

But what about the Gabriola quarry? In 1895,⁷ we read in *The Victoria Daily Colonist*:

NANAIMO, June 7:

H. Keefer, the well known contractor of Vancouver, is about to open a quarry on Gabriola Island. The site is in the vicinity of the “Farmers' Landing” on M. Manly's property. The opening of this quarry will necessitate the employment of some 30 men.

This appears to be carelessly reported because I have found no other evidence of quarrying on Mike Manly's Gabriola land, and the Farmers' Landing was on John Canessa's property, not Manly's.⁸ The land Manly had bought from Canessa was further round toward the west of Descanso Bay, then called Rocky Bay. And we know that

⁶ 1888 *Vancouver City Directory Williams'*; 1889 *Williams' BC Directory*; 1890 *Henderson's City of Vancouver Directory*; 1890 and 1891 *Williams' Vancouver and New Westminster Cities Directory*.

⁷ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p.2, June 8, 1895.

⁸ It is possible that there was some private arrangement for Canessa's neighbour Mike Manly to look after Canessa's Gabriola land while Canessa was in Vancouver thereby causing this confusion.

⁵ Jenni Gehlbach, *Gabriola's Dimension-Stone Quarry*, *SHALE* 19, p.12, November 2008.

Vancouver Granite Company bought Canessa's land in 1902, not Manly's.

In November 1895, the following article appeared about the new post office to be built in Victoria.^{9,10} It corroborated that the Gabriola quarry had been operating since the early summer, and that the stone was usually shipped unfinished from Gabriola to the customers in Vancouver and Victoria:

NEW POST OFFICE

The Contract for the Sandstone let to the Gabriola Granite Company.

The contractors for the new post office and customs house, Messrs. Elford & Smith, have let the contract for the sandstone for superstructure to the Gabriola Granite Co. ... samples submitted to ... Ottawa for examination and testing have been approved. This stone is a light gray in color and handsome in appearance, taking a nice finish.

The quarry has been in operation all summer and a lot of the stone is now being supplied for several buildings in Vancouver. On account of a full plant for quarrying and loading being already at the quarry and the works in operation the stone can be brought down to Victoria at short notice. Consequently by Thursday or Friday the first cargo will probably be landed and cutters at work on it. The amount of this stone to be used on the new post office and customs house is about 60,000 superficial feet.

Messrs. Elford & Smith have already sheds erected so that inclement weather will not interrupt the cutters and sawyers. Of these thirty will have constant employment during the winter and on fine days there will be room for more. A new feature in Victoria is the use of electricity to operate the saws for cutting the stones into slabs. The electricity will be furnished by the tramway company's powerhouse, and the saws will be run from 6 o'clock in the morning till midnight.

There is no record of any *Gabriola Granite Company* in the Corporate Registry in the 1890s

⁹ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p.7, November 10, 1895.

¹⁰ *Gabriola's Dimension-Stone Quarry...* *ibid*, p.14.

or in the City Directories of Vancouver, Victoria or Nanaimo. No granite, quarried or otherwise, exists on Gabriola, and I have found no other mention of this company. The name is most probably a reporting error—shorthand for *Vancouver Granite Company* quarrying on Gabriola.

Quarrying in the 1900s

Having established when Gabriola sandstone's potential was first noticed and when it was first quarried, it was a delight to find an article that confirmed that the dimension-stone quarry was still operating in 1907. In the *Victoria Daily Colonist* of January 20, 1907, we read on page 7:

It is not generally known that Vancouver Island quarries are supplying large quantities of stone for the erection of buildings in the Terminal city. The Gribble & Skene Co. is constructing a large apartment house adjoining the Hotel Vancouver and for this work alone has used about 3,000 feet of stone from the Gabriola Island quarries. This gives a lot of additional work to local masons. The stone is brought down from the quarries to Victoria in mill blocks, and cut here before being shipped to Vancouver. The only loss suffered by the company mentioned during the recent cold weather was of stone, worth about \$1,000, that became penetrated by the frost, which rendered it unsuitable for working.

Canessa, Nicol, and the Vancouver Granite Company

The newspaper articles that had initially caught my interest were about John Canessa, pre-emptor of the Gabriola quarry lands, and his involvement in a rancorous court case listed as *Canessa v. Nicol*.

On May 29, 1896, we read in "The City" column on page 2 of *The Victoria Times Colonist*:

A MOTION for an injunction was made yesterday before the Chief Justice in *Canessa v. Nicol* to restrain the defendant

from quarrying stone on plaintiff's property on Gabriola Island. Plaintiff and defendant last year made an agreement whereby defendant for the sum of \$25 was given the right to prospect on plaintiff's land, and for the sum of \$300 a year could quarry sandstone there, with a further proviso that defendant had the option of purchasing the land at \$10 an acre.

Defendant decided to purchase, but plaintiff now alleges that when he signed the agreement he was not aware of the purchase clause in the agreement, and he now wishes to eject defendant from the property. An affidavit on behalf of defendant stated that he is engaged in supplying stone from the quarry under contract to Smith & Elford, contractors for the new post office here.

The court ordered that defendant be allowed to continue quarrying on payment into court of \$300 to be applied in payment of rent if it is hereafter decided that a lease be granted, or to be applied towards the purchase money if the purchasing clause be held good.

Mr. H.D. Helmcken, Q.C., for plaintiff, Mr. E.B. Bodwell for defendant.

This article certainly clarified what type of lease arrangement was in place for quarrying on Canessa's land. But the land dispute aspects of the case also intrigued me—who was this mysterious “Nicol”? In the 1880s,¹¹ Canessa had cantankerously and successfully fought a trespass suit against his Gabriola neighbour Alexander Hoggan. Would this later dispute with Nicol reveal more about Canessa's character?

A subsequent article about the dispute more precisely identified the plaintiff as W.L. Nicol,¹² whose first listing as a resident of Vancouver, at the corner of Bute and Comox, appeared in the 1895 *Williams' Official BC Directory*. But, interestingly, in the 1897 *Henderson's BC Gazeteer and Directory*, W.L. Nicol is listed as the

proprietor of *Vancouver Granite Company* with offices at 122 and 124 Alexander—Keefer's business place. Since Nicol is named in the case as the person supplying stone to Smith and Elford for the Victoria post office, this confirmed that the 1895 report had been inaccurate in naming the company involved as the *Gabriola Granite Company*.

John Canessa had left Nanaimo and sailed to Vancouver in the late 1880s, and in 1891, he had tried unsuccessfully to sell his Gabriola land.¹³ In 1894, he was listed in the *Williams' Official BC Directory* as a fisherman living at False Creek near the CPR bridge in Vancouver, and he was still listed in the 1898 edition of *Henderson's BC Gazeteer and Directory* as living in a “cabin near Granville Bridge”.

The *Canessa v. Nicol* trial opened before Mr. Justice Drake on July 19, 1897 and the newspaper reported:¹⁴

This is a suit for damages brought by plaintiff against defendant for trespass on property on Gabriola Island. Plaintiff leased a quarry to defendant, the agreement containing a purchase clause giving defendant option to purchase. Plaintiff who is an Italian and not familiar with the language, claims there was no purchase clause in the agreement when it was read to him at the time it was signed.

Hon. C.F. Pooley, Q.C., and H.D. Helmcken, C.C., for plaintiff;
Mr. E.P. Davis, Q.C. for defendant.

The suggestion of unfair dealings with this non-English-speaking immigrant is clear, but evidently Nicol's right to purchase the quarry was upheld, though it seems not to have been possible to enforce the ruling. The case dragged on, Canessa appealed—it was listed amongst cases “to receive

¹¹ Jenni Gehlbach, *Gabrielans and the Sandstone Quarry*, *SHALE* 19, p.44, November 2008.

¹² *Victoria Daily Colonist* August 15, 1899, p.8.

¹³ *Gabrielans and the Sandstone Quarry*... *ibid*, p.45.

¹⁴ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p.5, July 20, 1897.

consideration” at the March 1898 sitting of the Full Court¹⁵—but his appeal was unsuccessful. Canessa felt he had been unfairly dealt with and adamantly refused to sign the conveyance papers as ordered by the court. The results were scandal and furore. He was clapped in jail in New Westminster early in 1899 for an indefinite period.

Meanwhile, Nicol made a formal charge against Joseph Martin, an ex-attorney general of BC who had acted as counsel to Canessa. Nicol claimed that Canessa had offered Martin a leasehold of the quarry for a nominal sum if he won the case. This resulted in Martin being suspended from the bench for a week by the Law Society. On August 15, 1899 we read:¹⁶

**Suspended by The Benchers.
Law Society Consider the Charge of
Champerty Against Mr. Martin.
Given Time in Which to Appeal Before
Suspension Becomes Effective.**¹⁷

Mr. Joseph Martin, ex-attorney-general of British Columbia, was yesterday suspended by the benchers of the Law Society for one week, the suspension to take effect on October 1, for practicing champerty. This date mentioned was chosen to enable Mr. Martin to appeal from the decision of the benchers to the Full court, at its September sitting, and thus have the courts pass on the matter before the suspension takes effect. There is some doubt as to whether the old English law prohibiting the practice of champerty applies to British Columbia.

Canessa continued to refuse to sign over his land to Nicol. But his family was suffering

from his absence and his plight was receiving much sympathy in Vancouver and in Nanaimo. More than a thousand people signed a petition on his behalf. In September 1899, we read:

PROVINCIAL NEWS: VANCOUVER, Sept. 21

There appears to be an opinion in some quarters that there has been a miscarriage of justice in the committing to gaol by the Supreme Court of the plaintiff in the case of *Canessa vs Nichol [sic]*, early in the year, on the ground of contempt, and the government is now being memorialized on behalf of the prisoner. The memorial is signed by no less than 1,000 citizens of Vancouver and Nanaimo, and is in the hands of Mr. C. E. Tisdall, M.P.P., who has undertaken to submit it in the right quarter. It is addressed respectfully to the Lieutenant-Governor and members of the executive council of British Columbia and reads as follows:

“Whereas John Canessa is confined in gaol at New Westminster on an order of Mr. Justice Martin, judge of the Supreme Court of British Columbia, for an indefinite period because said Canessa refused to sign a deed of conveyance of certain lands on Gabriola Island; and

“Whereas said Canessa believes that the agreement for sale of said land was obtained from him by fraud; and

“Whereas said Canessa has now been confined in gaol for six months; and

“Whereas the confinement is seriously affecting his health, and that of his daughter, who is now confined in the hospital at Vancouver

“Therefore we, the petitioners, do humbly pray that your honorable body will use every effort in your power to release said Canessa from prison and restore him to his family.”

In November, Vancouver’s labour organizations joined the fray and Canessa was finally released, though he never did sign the conveyance:¹⁸

¹⁸ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p.8, November 22, 1899, and p.6, November 30, 1899.

¹⁵ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p.6, March 5, 1898.

¹⁶ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, p.8, August 15, 1899, and p.7, September 22, 1899.

¹⁷ “Champerty” is an aggravated form of “maintenance”, which is the support of litigation by a stranger without just cause. The distinguishing feature of champerty is support in return for a share of the proceeds.

November 22, Vancouver's News Budget—An Obstinate Italian

The labor organizations of Vancouver are again to take up the case of Canessa the Italian who remains in gaol pending compliance with the order of court to sign the deed for property, which he sold. He has now been many months in gaol, and still declines to obey the order.

November 30, Canessa Free at Last

Spent Eight Months in Gaol for Refusing to Sign Conveyance Order Made Vesting the Property in Nicol, and Defendant Liberated.

The long pending case of *Canessa v. Nicol* has been settled and an order has been made releasing from the New Westminster jail the plaintiff Canessa, who was committed over eight months ago for refusing to sign a conveyance to the stone quarry in dispute, which the court decided belonged to Nicol. Before the order for liberation was made, however, an order was made vesting the quarry in Nicol, Canessa having refused to the last to sign the conveyance....

...Mr. Justice [Archer] Martin's judgement on the motions made yesterday follow:

"The prisoner has been in jail for over eight months and I agree with both counsel in now regarding him as a monomaniac on this subject, and no good object will be obtained by his further imprisonment under the circumstances. The consent of the defendant and the granting of the vesting order remove any difficulty, so far as the opposite party is concerned, and as regards the court itself its dignity will not be affected by taking a merciful view of the situation and liberating such a prisoner..."

When he came out of jail in 1899, Canessa took a job at BCSR Cooperage near his Vancouver cabin and Granville Bridge.¹⁹ Nicol was still listed as the proprietor of *Vancouver Granite Company*, but with offices now at 419 Hastings St. West.

¹⁹ Listed in the 1899-1900 and 1901 editions of *Hendersons' BC Gazetteer and Directory*.

By 1901, Canessa was again listed as a fisherman, but W.L. Nicol had disappeared from the Vancouver directory listings. That year, the newly incorporated firm *Vancouver Granite Company* was listed with offices and works at 139 Alexander Street. The Managing Director and Secretary Treasurer were H.F. Keefer and W.C. Ditmars. On September 4, 1902,²⁰ *Vancouver Granite Company* bought the Gabriola quarry lands ("containing eighty-eight acres more or less") from Canessa for \$300.²¹

Wondering what became of William Nicol, I checked the Crown-Granted Mineral Claims in the Reports of the Ministry of Mines. On June 29, 1898, in Yale BC, Wm. L. Nicol *et al* had staked a claim called Rocky Point for just over 42 acres in the District of Osoyoos (in Lot 802, G.1). Maybe he struck it rich, or at least got a decent settlement from the *Vancouver Granite Company*.

In the 1901 census, he is listed as a rancher with Scottish roots, born in Ontario in 1852. He was married to Ellen, born in 1863, also in Ontario. At the time of the 1911 census, they were retired and living in Vancouver with their two children, Henry and Gertrude (listed earlier as Laura G.), aged 19 and 22 respectively, and so born around the time of the court case. William died in Vancouver in 1936 at the age of 83.²² ◇

²⁰ This date could be read as July 4, 1902. The title document is unclear, as both July and September are handwritten in the space provided on the form. However, the Land Registry Act Form A written in 1917 specifies the date for the Conveyance in Fee from John Canessa to Vancouver Granite Company as September 4, 1902.

²¹ You can read more about the history of sandstone quarrying on Gabriola in *SHALE* 19, November 2008.

²² Reg# 1936-09-510965; MF# B13155

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to Barrie Humphrey for first alerting me to the newspaper articles mentioning the Canessa v. Nicol case and the database in which he found them.

Corrections to the earlier article in *SHALE* 19

EDITOR'S NOTE: A complete up-to-date list of corrections in all issues of *SHALE* can be found at: <http://www.nickdoe/pdfs/Webp211.pdf>

In the footnote 19 (42, fn.4), "Dennis E. Canessa" should have been "Dennis G. Canessa". Add at the end "Her daughter, Donna L. Wess, lives with her." "1840" 19 (43) should be "1850".

Change the sentence 19 (46), "They lived in the lower mainland..." to "They lived mainly in the lower mainland. However, Caroline in her later years lived with her daughter in Kamloops, where she died at 94 in 1972."

Add a comma 19 (46), "...my informant,".

Change 19 (46), "...Byron and Hogel ("Jack"), and a daughter Zelma" to "...Byron and Hogel ("Jack"), and a daughter Rosabel".

Newcastle Island and the US Mint in San Francisco

In Jenni's earlier article, *The origins of quarrying for sandstone on Gabriola, SHALE* 19, pp.3–9, she noted that commercial quarrying for sandstone in the local area began in 1869 with the signing of a lease between the Vancouver Coal and Land Company, who then owned the Nanaimo coalmines, and a contractor for the US Mint, Mr. Joseph Emery. The lease permitted the cutting of stone for the new Mint building in San Francisco.

At the time, there was a lively trade in coal between Nanaimo and California, and so it is not surprising that two businessmen, Emery and Mark Bate, the coalmine manager, met and were able to do a deal. However, as noted in footnote 13 of the article, it is a little surprising that the provision of sandstone from a foreign country for such a prestigious building was acceptable to the US government, especially given that sandstone is not the rarest of rocks.

According to published historical sources, because the stone from Newcastle Island was "foreign", it went through more severe tests than would normally be required, and only after the United States Inspector certified that the stone was of the highest character was it found acceptable (Bill Merilees, *Newcastle Island...*, p.56).

Rather curious as to the nature of these "severe tests", I started delving into the San Francisco archives. So far, I've not located a copy of the United States Inspector's final report; however, what has come to light is the following very curious letter.

The letter is dated October 15, 1869, and was written by the chief Architect of the new Mint, Alfred B. Mullet of the Treasury Department, and addressed to George Sewall Boutwell, who resigned from the US House of Congress in 1869 to accept the appointment of Secretary of the Treasury from President Ulysses S. Grant in 1869—not junior officials you'll note.

In part, the letter says, "...the stone offered by J.S. Emery, which is obtained from the Island of New Westminster in the San Juan Group, claimed and I believe owned by the US, is a beautiful blue free stone of extraordinary strength and durability and will I think present a beautiful and satisfactory appearance and give every satisfaction to the citizens of that material." (*my emphasis*)

Well, well! Bet you didn't know that Newcastle Island was once owned by the United States and that New Westminster was an island.

I'll try to find out more. ◇

Nick Doe