

LONDON IN IT'S HEY DAY: the 1880s and 1890s

In the 1880s and '90s London had a public wharf, a store, a post office, a boarding house, church and school. These amenities would have been extensively used by London residents and others who lived in the area. People would have attended church services, sent their children to school, shopped for goods, and picked up their mail at London. People stayed at the boarding house while their homes, in the area, were being built. The London Wharf was often the first stop for settlers to the area. If people needed to travel, they could take a steamboat from the London wharf.

The main industries at London were farming, fishing, and canning. One could assume that farmers in the area, who did not have water front property, would have used the public wharf at London for the shipment of their produce and to receive supplies. The other closest public landings would have been at Steveston or Woodward.

The canneries near London would have had their own wharves and not needed to use the public London wharf. The cannery workers and fishermen who came to work in the London area canneries would probably have accessed the amenities at London. Transient peoples, they would not have played an important part in the formation or changes at London, but they would have used the services available.

The pioneer family that is most closely linked to the town of London is the London brothers, Charles and William. They operated businesses, were active in early municipal life, were early farmers and were probably well known at the time. In 1886, they opened a store and boarding house near the London wharf. The London Brothers Store is referred to in the 1889 Lulu Island Directory as a general store and temperance hotel. The Lulu Island post office was moved from Phoenix Cannery to the London Bros. store and William London served as postmaster. In an interview, Mrs. Lucy (London) Howse, Charles London's daughter, refers to the London Bros. Store as her uncle's store. [89] This agrees with land titles records which list William London as the sole owner of the land on which the store was located.

William London was active in the early Richmond municipality. He served on the municipal council in 1883, 1884, 1885, 1886, and 1887. He also served as an early "fence viewer", which was described in the Line Fence Act as a job involving the, "construction, opening, maintenance and repair of ditches and watercourses between adjoining lands". [90]

It is unclear if William London ever married, or had children. He died in 1899 and his will was admitted to probate on April 9, 1900. His land was not transferred to family members, this would lead one to assume that he did not have any family other than his brother. His land was transferred to two individuals, John Bowditch and Nancy Lulu Frazer.

In the land titles records, Nancy Frazer is not listed as the wife of anyone. If she had been married the name of her husband would have been listed, one could assume that she was single. Ms. Frazer became the owner of lots 6,7 block II, and lots 4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13, in block III.(Fig.4) In 1900 Ms. Frazer transferred lot 11, block III to Isabella Corkill. (Fig.4) Isabella Corkill was married to Edward Corkill who was listed in the British Columbia Directory of 1900 as an engineer.

In 1901, Ms. Frazer sold lots 12, 13 in block III to Pehr Edward Johnson.(Fig.4) Pehr Johnson had previously purchased lots 14 & 15 in block III, and lot 8, block I from Charles and William London in 1898.(Fig.4) Pehr Johnson eventually sold all this land to Robert Johnson in 1907. I was unable to find out if Robert and Pehr were related.

Unfortunately more information has not been located about Nancy Frazer. It would be interesting to find out who she was and why she benefited from William London's will.

As William London was involved in the early Richmond municipality, and business his brother, Charles London, (1861-1941) turned his energies towards farming. In 1888 Charles London married Henrietta Dalziel, and shortly after built the London Farm house. The farm house currently at the London farm was the second home. They had eight children, Louis Alexander (1895-1964), William Edwin (1889-1965), Lucy May (b.1898), Mary Margaret who was known as May(b.1901), and Florence Henrietta, three other sons died as babies.[91] Charles London owned and operated the farm until he sold it to his daughter Lucy in 1920, she had married Herbert Howse in 1919.

John Bowditch worked as a postal clerk at the Lulu Island Post Office. He became postmaster after William London's death. Bowditch was the other beneficiary of William London's will and he came to own lots 1,2,3,4,5 in block II, and lots 1,2 in block I. The land in block II included the London Bros. Store, the land in block I had the wharf access. In 1946, the wharf at London has been referred to as Bowditch Wharf.[92]

Other Richmond pioneers accessed London for the wharf, store, and boarding house. In 1889-90, Solomon V. Branscombe and his wife Eleanor moved to Lulu Island with their children Mabel and Frank. They lived in the London Bros. Boarding House while their home at Steveston Highway was being built.[93] Mabel Branscombe attended the English school at No. 2 and No.9.[94]

The McKinney family moved to Lulu Island in 1890. They traveled from Vancouver on the "Dunsmuir" and docked at London. The McKinney family homestead was at the corner of No. 9 Road (Steveston Highway) and No. 2 Road (N W corner). The family was involved in the building of the original South Arm United Church.[95] The McKinney house is a prominent local Richmond landmark.

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