



ROCKLAND NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 5276, Station B, Victoria BC, V8R 6N4

Autumn 2015 Newsletter

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Please share a copy of the RNA Newsletter with a neighbour.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE RECEPTION

by Ian Mayhill, RNA Membership

In the Summer 2015 RNA Newsletter, we were asked to “save the date” of August 7 for the biennial Reception at Government House, open to members of our neighbourhood association and one hundred and fifteen of us heeded the call. As one of that number, I am pleased to report that the occasion was a splendid, high-summer affair and as RNA coordinator for the event, was gratified to receive



appreciative comments from other attendees who had enjoyed the experience as much as had I.

Government House is well-rehearsed at holding parties in its beautiful premises. We initially gathered in the main foyer and promptly at 5:30, were invited to file into the drawing room where Her Honour, Judith Guichon, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, greeted each one of us in turn.

After this formality, we proceeded into the magnificent ballroom to the sophisticated stylings of the Louise Rose Jazz Trio and where delicious and plentiful refreshments – including cider made with fruit from the Dorothy Lam orchard - were laid out for our delectation.



Left: Provided by Janet Simpson; right: Helen Edwards photo

Our self-indulgence was interrupted momentarily by the skirl of bagpipes announcing the arrival of Her Honour and Distinguished Guest Janet Simpson, RNA President. Her Honour warmly welcomed all present to the official residence of BC's Lieutenant Governor, reminding us that we were also in the traditional territories of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. Our President graciously thanked Her Honour on behalf of our association and then took the opportunity to recognize RNA Board members for their services to our community.



Both photos: Provided by Janet Simpson

In conclusion, there are two new dates I would ask each of us to save:

Mid-summer 2017 for the next Government House Reception and January 1, 2016 – make application to renew our RNA memberships. On December 31st of this year, our current memberships expire.

Clearly, the Reception is an attractive and prestigious social event for the Rockland neighbourhood as was evidenced by the abrupt surge in Association membership during the month of July. It is “icing on the cake” in relation to the shopping-cart of more prosaic yet no less compelling reasons for supporting the RNA with our memberships. I believe that it is worth bringing to mind several key areas where the small band of our neighbours, who make up the Board of Directors, volunteers time, energy and considerable expertise to benefit the broader Rockland community:

Land Use

Environment

Woodland Garden

Rockland Heritage

Liaison with City Hall

Rockland is the home of choice to some 4,000 souls of whom less than 5 percent acknowledge the efforts of the Board with active membership in the RNA. As director for Membership, I am puzzled as to this extraordinary disconnect and would endeavour to seek remedy where possible.

ACORN BOUNTY by David Clark

We are reaping the rewards of an incredible growing season. Many plants are laden with a robust bounty of fruits and seeds. It's the best year ever for our apples. Garry Oaks, in particular, have dropped lots of viable acorns.



Although BC's provincial bird, the Steller's Jay, is common in the outskirts, it takes an exceptional acorn year to attract them in large numbers to Rockland.

Garry Oaks are Victoria's and Rockland's

signature native tree. There are Dozens of Native Oaks in California, but only this one, also known as the Oregon White Oak, ranges into Canada via Oregon's Willamette Valley and Puget Sound. The Olympic Mountains provide the best rain shadow on the Pacific Coast.

Oaks are very long lived, and very slow growing. We have a great legacy of middle-aged and old oaks in the neighbourhood, but there hasn't been much recruitment of the next generation since the neighbourhood became residential. Most years the majority of acorns are dry, not fully formed, or have pinholes indicating weevil damage. This year there are plenty of fully formed acorns, and the moist weather of the past few weeks has kept them from drying out.



Indeed, many are sending out their radicle that will become the root system.

Plant some acorns in the place where you would like a future tree, with the radicle pointing straight down, and cover with an inch of moist soil.



Or, you can start them in pots. Because they have tap roots, it is better to start them in a tall, narrow container.



Photos supplied by Dave Clark

Use a well-drained and highly aerated soil mix, top with an inch of soil, and a skim of sand or fine gravel. Leaves should appear next February.

There is much more information about oaks and their propagation at the Garry Oak Recovery Team website: <http://www.goert.ca/> including these leaflets from Rob Hagel of the Pacific Forestry Centre in Victoria on propagating

<http://www.goert.ca/documents/Growing-Garry-Oak-Seedlings-in-Small-Containers.pdf>

... and planting seedlings

<http://www.goert.ca/documents/Forestry-Facts-Garry-Oak-Guidelines-Hagel.pdf>

SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE

by Janet Simpson

As a result of the timely actions of several Rockland residents, this 70-foot Atlas cedar has been saved.

An appeal was successfully launched to stop the cutting permit, and the property owner is willing to seek a pruning permit instead.

The purpose of the Tree Preservation Bylaw is to protect and preserve significant and endangered trees. At 70 feet in height and with its massive girth, this Atlas cedar is definitely significant in terms of the canopy it provides



Photo supplied by Janet Simpson

and the privacy and softening it offers the tenants of the surrounding properties. It also provides valuable shelter for birds, insects and other creatures.

We are losing our urban forest - the “lungs of the community” - on a daily basis. Parks should not be issuing cutting permits for healthy, mature trees without a discussion with the neighbourhood, at the very least.

As the Official Community Plan emphasizes, healthy communities require healthy ecosystems. Taking down large, healthy trees must be the last resort, to be considered only after every alternative has been investigated.

Thank you to all of those Rockland residents who stepped up to do what they could to save this tree. Their success should be an encouragement to all of us!

**LETTER REGARDING 750 PEMBERTON ROAD
REZONING**
printed with the permission of the writer.

Dear Mayor Helps and City Council
October 15, 2015

Subject: 750 Pemberton Road Rezoning Proposal

We are the owners of the 2 bungalows backing onto the heritage building and meadows at 750 Pemberton Road in the Rockland neighbourhood. Our addresses are 744 Pemberton Road and 730 Pemberton Road. We were recently approached by *Melanie Smith Developments* to advise that a rezoning application for Pemberton Meadows was forthcoming to increase density on the site. We drafted this letter to register our objections to this proposal to avoid any more resources being deployed.

The property was purchased, and changed hands September 1, 2015, from relatives of the previous owner for approx. \$2.4 M. The new owners immediately canvassed the current tenants, and a few weeks later the surrounding neighbors, to advise they bought the property with the intention of rezoning and redeveloping the existing green space for single and duplex strata housing. This has prompted neighbors to organize to oppose the rezoning. The following is our assessment.

Background

The property was rezoned several years ago to permit the previous owner to operate transient housing rental accommodations. City Council permitted this rezoning to allow the owner to generate increased revenues for ongoing and long-term maintenance of the heritage building and grounds.

This *spot* rezoning created the **T-22 Zone Pemberton Transient Accommodation Zone** with very specific requirements. One of the rezoning requirements specified in T-22 is that “*the area for the new zone have a minimum of 5,380 M²*”; which is the area of the site. Because the site currently contains 9 rental units; we believe this a significant requirement, which should continue as a tenant and neighbourhood amenity.

Removal of Much Needed Green Space

When we learned of plans to once again rezone the property the first question we asked ourselves was: *Would this proposed rezoning improve or detract from the site and neighbourhood?* For several reasons we believe the proposal will do more harm than good to the Rockland neighbourhood. Our primary concern is that it removes active green space from a neighbourhood deficient in active green space.

Densification

In addition, the proposal would increase density on this site for the second time unnecessarily, as it already operates successfully as a rental property. The green space proposed for elimination is integral to the heritage building setting as well as the recreational needs of the tenants. In our opinion, and that of our neighbors, the current density of 9 dwelling units on the site, is high enough. Several neighbours we talked to believe the neighbourhood has already supported its fair share of *densification*. Any additional density compromises the estate character of the neighbourhood and is inconsistent with provisions in the Official Community Plan.

Accommodating Tax Payers Rather Than Speculators

If you drive through our neighbourhood, currently on the Victoria sightseeing tour bus route, you will see that we have upgraded and maintained our properties to a high standard. This is because we believe we are secure in maintaining our property investments and will not see the further desecration of the older properties and green space in the neighbourhood by speculators. We hope and trust that elected officials will allow us to continue to enjoy the estate character of our neighbourhood as described in the *Official Community Plan*.

We understand this has a cost. The Rockland Neighbourhood is taxed in accordance with the highest classification of property assessment in Victoria because the lots are large and setbacks significant. Our privacy is an important by-product protected by the *estate character* profile. We believe it is in the best interests of the City of Victoria to stop the slow destruction of the unique characteristics of heritage neighbourhoods through speculative *spot* rezoning.

Enhance the Green Space Rather Than Destroy It

We enjoy watching tenants and their extended families using the lovely gardens at the south meadow of the property for picnics, weddings, and birthday parties. Some of the residents enjoy planting their own gardens, as well as sharing in the maintenance of the flower beds at the front of the Heritage house. These activities are very complementary to the heritage mansion setting and should continue. We were all very disappointed to learn that the developers intend to *take out* most of the trees and gardens surrounding the heritage mansion. This would be a travesty. Both existing tenants and homeowners in the immediate vicinity selected their residences with the belief this property would retain the estate character of the heritage setting. We would encourage and support more trees planted in the south meadow to ensure the diversity and survival of the Garry Oak ecosystem, not fewer. This property, together with our properties, hosts an environment rich in many species of birds, insects and wildlife. All of these components are important and should remain off limits to redevelopment to enable all to continue to enjoy the natural beauty of our surroundings. We believe protecting the green space at Pemberton Meadows is paramount to the future enjoyment of our property, privacy and lifestyle and that of the tenants and tourists.

It is ironic that City Councils in many capital cities in Canada are seeking to achieve equity in the distribution of green space in their cities by acquiring more. By using *Reserve Fund* revenues, accumulated through their

Provincial Planning Acts these municipalities are able to acquire additional green space in inner city neighbourhoods deficient in green space. The Rockland neighbourhood however has been experiencing quite the opposite trend. In addition to the replacement of valued older residences, the displacement of invaluable and unique natural ecosystems is a very disconcerting trend to observe for long-term taxpayers. City Council should be expanding and supporting the treasures that older neighbourhoods possess whenever possible.

Common Sense Should Prevail

Of course the big question is why?? Why would someone purchase a beautiful property with a solid rental business and within days of taking possession hire architects to redevelop the green space? Why would a purchaser speculate that City Council would rezone the property once again, just to increase the density of the property? We believe the answers are self-evident.

This Type of Housing Does Not Fulfill A Public Need

We have attached two recent articles the Times Colonist (3/10/2015) one which reports on page A3 the results of a very recent study of the Victoria housing market. It states there is “*an oversupply of high-income market ownership housing...*” the same form of housing proposed in the rezoning densification scheme.

A second article on Page A11 has the title “*Garry Oaks need preservation on a wide scale*” a position we advocate. Please read these articles and we are confident you will agree that the 750 Pemberton Road rezoning proposal does nothing to support the Official Community Plan and indeed is in direct conflict with the stated policy to *preserve the estate character of the Rockland neighbourhood and important vistas*. It also does not fulfill any altruistic public need. Pemberton Meadows is too important an ecosystem and neighbourhood recreational focal point to destroy for a few more single-family dwelling units.

We implore you to respect the decision of the past City Council and leave the density as it is; to protect this sensitive green space of which we have so little in this neighbourhood; to protect the way of life: vistas, sightlines and privacy currently enjoyed by tenants and owners alike, and respect our neighbourhood values. Do not allow the rezoning process to proceed.

Thank you very much in advance for your attention to this matter.

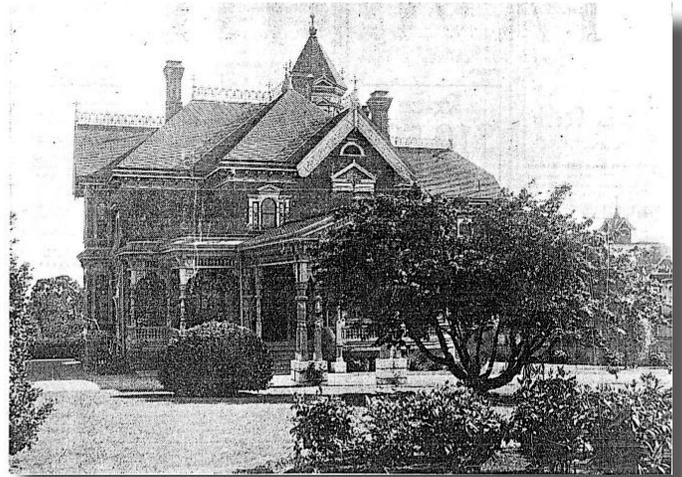
ROCKLAND HERITAGE by Helen Edwards

This article is about a mansion that once graced the corner of Rockland Avenue and Moss Street with its acreage fronting on Rockland, Moss and Richardson Street. Known as Gisburn, all that remains today is a granite wall and iron fence with gateposts.

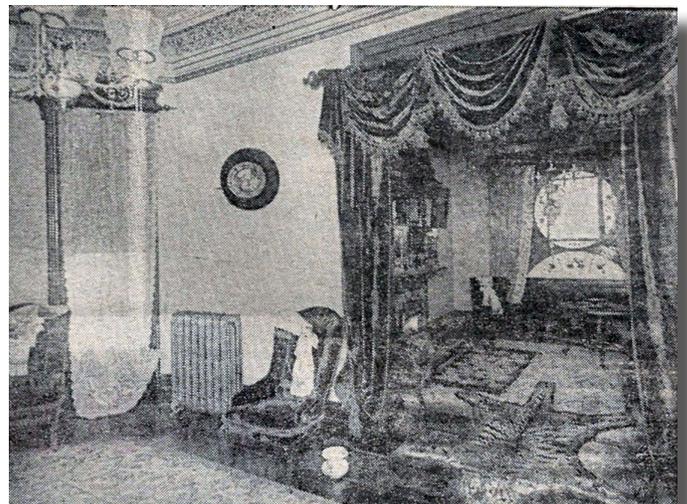


The impressive dwelling was built in 1891 for Robert Irving, an English-born American citizen, who came here from Portland to represent several shipping and railway firms. For some strange reason, there was no newspaper description of it during construction and we do not know the name of the architect or any of the tradesmen involved. It was said to have cost \$40,000 to build - a small fortune at the time. In 1896, an ad for a "first class cook" appeared in the Victoria Daily Colonist of October 10, 1896. The Irving family seem to have left the house about 1900. This is confirmed by the May 22, 1900 auction of the "Superb Contents of Gisburn" as offered on instructions of Robert Irving. The list of items available included "elegant drawing room suite in crimson silk that cost \$700, very rare Tiger and other skin rugs, very handsome carved oak dining room suite with real morocco seats and backs, mahogany and cherry bedroom suites, and mahogany secretary and book case." Also included in the sale was a "pair of fine, well-matched roan driving horses." The house was then occupied by Robin Dunsmuir and his wife, Maude Allingham Shoobert, who lived there while their home on Esquimalt Road was being built.

The next resident of the home was John Beaugarde Hobson, the manager of the Cariboo Consolidated Mining Co. Ltd. His family does not seem to have lived there very long as the property was offered for sale in 1910. A large advertisement in the January 18, 1910 Victoria Daily Colonist described the property as follows:



"This handsome Residence and Grounds, situated at the Southwest Corner of Rockland Avenue and Moss Streets, and backing on Richardson Street, 300 x 600 x 300 feet, is offered for sale en block. The Residence is one of the finest in Victoria, complete in every detail. The interior is beautifully finished in English Oak, Mahogany, Cherry, etc., with hardwood floors and artistically painted walls and ceilings. The bathrooms are luxurious, the heating by hot water, and the plumbing is the very best. The basement contains spacious storerooms as also does the attic floor, where is situated a large steel tank for storing water for domestic and fire purposes. The Residence is very substantially built on a concrete foundation, has been kept in thorough repair and represents an expenditure in itself of over \$60,000. The stabling for horses, cows, etc., with workmen's cottages, cost over \$6,000.



Left: Hallmark Heritage Society Archives; top right: Victoria Daily Colonist, January 18, 1910; bottom: Victoria Daily Colonist, November 30, 1969.

The Garden and Lawns are the most attractive in Victoria, being possessed of numerous ornamental trees and shrubs

and hedges which can only be attained with many years' cultivation. There is also an excellent orchard of large and small fruits and vegetable garden, with roomy paddock at the rear. The Granite Fence, with two sets of hand-made Iron Gates and Grille, could not be placed in position today for less than \$25,000. The scenic outlook is most beautiful, the property commanding an uninterrupted view of pleasing foreground, the ever-changing beauties of the Straits of Juan de Fuca and the Islands to the east, and the grand and glorious Olympian Range of Mountains. Placing a reasonable value on Residence and other improvements, and estimating land values from sales of property on Linden Avenue, there is a value present in the "Gisburn" property of \$160,000." The property was offered for sale for \$75,000 by W. H. Ellis.

An advertisement appeared on March 28, 1911 in which 5 lots, cut off the southern portion of the property, were offered for sale: four inside lots were to be sold for \$60 per front foot while the corner lot was offered at \$70 per front foot. Lots were 125 feet deep and backed onto a lane.

John Hobson died on January 10, 1912 and his body was shipped to Colma, California for burial. Shortly afterward, his widow offered the contents of her residence at public auction starting on March 19, 1912. The suggested value of the household contents was \$30,000 and included "nearly new and costly furniture, oil paintings, onyx and marble clocks."

The next owner of the property was John Alexander Rithet, son of Robert Rithet, Victoria businessman who served as Mayor of Victoria and was also elected to the provincial legislature. John was born in Victoria on October 27, 1878 and, on completion of his education, joined his father's firm, rising to the position of vice-president. He married Velda Morrill Wason in Cuyahoga County, Ohio on July 20, 1909 and they moved into Gisburn around between 1910 and 1912. Their first child, Velda Wason Rithet, was born on March 30, 1912 and Josephine arrived on March 30, 1915. Velda died on February 4, 1937 and was buried in Royal Oak Cemetery; the family left the house. John died in Nanaimo on September 11, 1942 and is buried in Ross Bay Cemetery.

The house was demolished in 1944, although ghostly-like ruins remained until the property was subdivided in the 1950s with lots along Rockland Avenue and more on the southern slope with Revercomb Place as a new access road. My mother used to make jams and pies from the fruit trees that were still producing on the site.

Today, all that remains of the once-spectacular mansion are the granite walls and the entrance gates.

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RNA Email Server List

Would you like to hear more about events in Rockland? Please join the neighbours list through the RNA website at www.rockland.bc.ca.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

The Rockland Neighbourhood Association Newsletter is published during the year. It is distributed electronically to all members. Submissions from members on issues of interest are always accepted and photographs are particularly welcome.

Deadline for the next newsletter is December 15, 2015

All submissions should be sent to Newsletter Editor, Helen Edwards at heritagelady@gmail.com

CAN WE HELP YOU?

Is there a building in Rockland that you would like to know more about? Do you have an old photo that needs identification? Let me know at heritagelady@gmail.com and I will see what I can find.