
John "Navy Jack" Thomas

FREIGHT PACKER - FERRY OPERATOR - GRAVEL MERCHANT
HOTELMAN - PROSPECTOR - FARMER

First Landowner in West Vancouver - 1872

A West Vancouver Historical Society research project

BACKGROUND

John Thomas, one of eleven brothers, was born, near Cardiff, in Wales about 1832 during the reign of William IV. As a young man, he sailed for western North America and arrived in B.C. Colony about 1859, during the Cariboo gold rush. According to his daughter Christine, in conversation with Capt. C.W. Cates in 1938, he had worked in many locations before arriving in Burrard Inlet in 1866.

Capt. T.J. Jackman, an early resident of Gastown, described him as being about 5ft. 9in. tall, 160-170 lbs., heavily built, square shouldered, dark curly hair, moustache, very temperate and kind to his family. He apparently came from a good family who repeatedly asked him to return to England.

ORIGIN OF THE TERM "NAVY"

The term "Navy" is described in the Oxford Dictionary as meaning "an excavator". The term originated in Britain during the great canal building period. At that time the canals were referred to as "Navigations" and those employed in the excavations became known as "Navvies". The term remains in common use today in England.

The few dozen men who opened up Burrard Inlet lived and worked on a first name basis. To differentiate between those with common names, descriptive or occupational and other nicknames were often used. Thus we had Navy Jack, Gassy Jack, August Jack, Peter the whaler, Portuguese Joe, "Sue" Moody and many others.

"Jack" has been a nickname for John since ancient times, therefore the talkative saloonkeeper John Deighton was known as "Gassy Jack", the gravel supplier was "Navy Jack" and so on. These particular nicknames were probably given sometime after Deighton arrived in a canoe with his barrel of whiskey on Sept. 30, 1867.

IN THE CARIBOO 1860 -1865

The first reference to his presence in the Colony occurs during the Cariboo Gold Rush where he was involved in the freighting business. The cariboo pack trail which preceded the wagon road was completed as far as Soda Creek in 1860 and John Thomas was said to be operating a riverboat carrying supplies from there to Quesnel during this period. Thomas would be about 30 years old at this time. His friend, Capt. Jackman stated that, in 1863, Thomas had packed, on his back, a piano from Quesnel to Barkerville charging \$200 - a dollar a pound! This appears to be only partly true. Barkerville Museum files imply that he was one of a party of five men who packed in the piano for Mary Nathan's Saloon. The piano was shipped from France in a sailing vessel around Cape Horn, up the Fraser to Hope by sternwheeler, to Quesnel by wagon, and then packed in to Barkerville. The instrument is known today as the Kelly piano and is in the Barkerville Museum collection.

The Cariboo wagon road reached Barkerville in 1865 and the large wagon trains replaced the independent freighter. Thomas' last known freight contract in the interior was in early 1866 involving the delivery of 175 pounds of beef over 35 miles of mountains in the Shuswap country. *FROM THE HEAD OF SEYAMOUR ARM INTO THE BIG BEND OF THE COL.*

BURRARD INLET - First ferry service 1866

Activity on the inlet had begun in 1863 with the building of the Pioneer Sawmill on the north shore. By 1866 a corduroy wagon road had been cut through to New Westminster from New Brighton and Hastings Mill was under construction. John Thomas arrived and began a ferry service on the inlet in the spring of 1866 using a five ton sloop (about 30 ft.) to carry passengers and freight between Moodyville, Hastings and the Westminster trail at New Brighton. He also used a rowboat where only one or two passengers were involved - a pioneers water taxi! Thomas operated this ferry service until Capt. Van Bramer arrived with his small steamer "Sea Foam" to begin a scheduled service which connected with the new daily stagecoach over Douglas Road in October 1866.

VANCOUVERS FIRST GRAVEL SUPPLIER 1867

John "Navy Jack" Thomas seems to have had an affinity for the transportation business. Undaunted when the "Sea Foam" displaced his ferry operation he began hauling clean river-washed gravel from the mouth of the Capilano to construction sites around the Inlet. This fine grade of sand-gravel mix, the major component in the making of concrete, is to this day called "Navyjack" in Vancouvers building trade. One might say that Thomas supplied the foundation on which early Vancouver was built. He would be pleased to know that, after 130 years, when builders need sand and gravel the call still goes out for "Navy Jack".

Until about 1882 his "city office" was reported to be a shack on the waterfront at the foot of Abbott St. in the village of Granville (commonly called "Gastown") The location was described as "behind the Methodist Parsonage, across from Simmons Hole-in-the-wall Saloon and just a few doors east of Madam Birdie Stewarts establishment". Obviously a center of commerce from which to promote gravel sales. This enterprise appears to have continued for over twenty years.

His base of operation in West Vancouver appears to have been in the only secure anchorage near the Capilano, in Swy-Wee Lagoon at the west edge of I.R. No.5. The entrance to the Lagoon had ample depth at high tide and his sloop would be protected from the sea on the south and west. (Later settlers called it "Ambleside Slough" and even later it was filled in to create today's park) The duckpond is all that remains of Swy-Wee Lagoon today. This Lagoon also saw the arrival of the second industry when Sewell Moody set up a logging camp just west of the entrance in 1870.

GRANVILLE HOTEL 1871 -73

The early 1870's seem to have been a time of prosperity for Thomas. The mills at Moodyville and Hastings were expanding as were the communities surrounding them and "Navyjack" was in great demand. In this period he invested in the hotel business, acquired land, built a house and became a married man.

Navy Jack invested in a partnership with Joseph Mannion in the operation of the newly built Granville Hotel erected by Ebenezer Brown. Mannion had been a contractor involved in the construction of Hastings Mill and later would become one of the first Aldermen of Vancouver. The hotel was rated as a respectable first class establishment of the time.

A MAN OF PROPERTY - 1872

Under the Land Proclamation of 1861, Crown Land was made available for settlement under the following terms. A single man could file on 160 acres at a price of four shillings and sixpence (roughly one dollar) per acre. The pre-emptor must record his claim and pay for the land when he occupied it. When he had made improvements to the extent of ten shillings an acre he would receive a certificate of improvement. With continued occupancy for a minimum of five years he could apply for a Crown Grant giving full title to the land. The later Dominion Lands Act was essentially the same.

By late 1871 Moodys men working on Timber Lease "G" had finished harvesting the prime timber near the waterfront and were working their way further up the slope. On April 14, 1872 James Blake, a stevedore supervising ship loading at Moodyville, filed a Pre-emption claim on 160 acres which would become D.L.775 in West Vancouver. Blake did not occupy and arranged with Colonial authorities for transfer of the pre-emption to John Thomas.

FIRST PERMANENT RESIDENCE IN W.V. - 1873

Navvy Jacks house, presently 1768 Argyle, appears to have been built about this time. Accounts describe "his neat white house, almost elegant for it's time" as being in place when Albert Finney arrived to lay the foundation for the first Point Atkinson Lighthouse in May 1874. Thomas sold his half interest in the Granville Hotel to his partner, Joe Mannion in 1873, presumably to finance the building of the house and barn on his property in West Vancouver.

The holding was described as choice wooded waterfrontage stretching from today's Navvy Jack Point to about 16th St. and extending inland to about Haywood Ave. The price, a tidy sum at the time - \$ 160.00 plus improvement requirements and building costs. The formal certificate of transfer was finally issued on Nov 24, 1874. The changeover from a British Colony to a Province of Canada in this period probably accounts for the delay in official recognition of the transfer.

The house was built using the finest material of the time, clear old-growth fir and cedar. The sheathing and sub-floors a full one inch thick and twelve inches wide and the floors of edge grain fir. The exterior was finished in distinctive moulded cedar siding and the interior in the vee-jointed paneling popular at the time. The full width porch across the front had lathe turned posts complete with victorian "gingerbread" ornamentation in the arches.

It is a credit to the builder that the house has served for 122 years. Many alterations and additions have been made during its life but the main structure would still be easily recognized by Navvy Jack today.

His barn appears to have been built to the same high standard. The building was renovated in the 1920's and served as the Masonic Hall until 1950 when it was replaced by the present Masonic Lodge on the same site.

A MARRIED MAN

In the early 1870's Thomas married Row-i-a, daughter of Quil-eet-rock, granddaughter of old Chief Ki-ep-i-lano. Rowias' elder sister was the wife of Joseph Silvey Simmons who operated the first store on Burrard Inlet. (see genealogy of Ki-ep-i-lano att.)

Accounts indicate Thomas was fond of gardening. He planted a small orchard of about thirty fruit trees, a vegetable garden and reportedly experimented with tobacco and even sugar cane. It is possible that he could sell surplus produce to the nearby logging camp operated by Moody. He eventually had several acres cleared as pasture for the horses and several cows. Water was piped for the garden, house and barn from a small weir a short distance up the creek.

NEW NEIGHBOURS

On March 17 1875 the Lighthouse at Point Atkinson began service with the arrival of lightkeeper Edwin Woodward and his wife. For nearly twenty years the lightkeepers would be the only other full time residents west of the Capilano.

In 1876 the population increased again with the birth of James Atkinson Woodward at Point Atkinson and Christine Thelka Thomas at Navvy Jacks Point. Christine died in March 1960, aged 84, at the home of Chief Dan George. She left two daughters, Edaline of Mission and Mrs. Amy George of Burrard. Ten grandchildren and twenty-three great-grandchildren.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas had three daughters; Christine married Chief Henry Jack. Emma, married Mr. Williams of Nanaimo. Mary, married Mr. Walker of Hartley Bay. *{1st. Findlay}* One son is mentioned; William "Samson" who later lived at Musqueam. The three daughters are buried side by side in the little cemetery near their birthplace. Further research in tracing the family line is underway at this time.

THE 1880'S

This was a decade of optimism in Burrard Inlet. The C.P.R. was under construction to link the coast with the rest of Canada. The Government, to prevent land speculation, suspended pre-emption privileges in the area until the terminus of the railway was decided.

The Thomas family in England urged Navvy Jack to send the children there to be educated. He chose instead, to hire as governess, a Miss Wynn to see to their education. Miss Wynn later married Mr. Jones, founder of the pioneer tent and awning company.

"Navvy Jack" would be approaching 50 at this time but still had an adventurous spirit. When the legendary tugboat master Charles H. Cates first arrived on the coast he and "Navvy Jack" bought a large rowboat from Andy Linton and embarked on a prospecting trip to the north coast. They experienced some excitement navigating through the infamous Euclataw Rapids in a rowboat - a trip few would attempt today without the benefit of a tidebook.

In 1886, when the first train arrived in Vancouver, "Navvy Jack" and his five ton sloop were reportedly still in operation.

Pre-emption privileges were restored in 1886 and within months Navvy Jack had neighbours. All waterfront land was quickly taken up though few others lived on their land full time. A road survey line was run to Eagle Harbour but this soon returned to nature. A boat would give the only access to these properties for many years yet.

Navvy Jack worked, for a time, at the Terminal Hotel in Vancouver travelling to and from work in a rowboat from West Vancouver. Our first commuter! He would be pleased to know that we follow his example to this day, although in somewhat more comfort.

An amusing newspaper story credits Navvy Jacks rooster as being the first aid to navigation at the entrance to First Narrows. The sternwheel steamer "Yosemite" was carrying excursion passengers from Victoria in the early morning of May 24, 1888. They encountered heavy fog on the difficult approach to First Narrows and decided to anchor until the fog lifted. When Navvy Jacks rooster began to crow the Captain took a bearing on the sound, raised anchor, safely navigated the harbour entrance and arrived on schedule.

Another interesting marine event occurred in 1891 when Navvy Jacks son William, a good boatman at age 10, rescued 6 year old Alfred Williams from drowning near the mouth of the Capilano. By strange coincidence, Alfred Williams nephew, Lloyd, now lives in the house built by Navvy Jack Thomas. The Williams family, during 1891, lived about a mile west of Navvy Jack.

THE 1890'S

The 1890's opened with optimism of continued growth and prosperity but 1892 saw the beginning of the great depression which culminated in the U.S. financial crisis of 1893. The new telegraph lines carried cancellations of orders for the sawmills and canneries and widespread layoffs were the result. Times were tough, money was tight and new construction suspended. The logging camp at Swy-Wee Lagoon closed down and the loggers moved out. It appears that Navvy Jack experienced financial losses along with the rest in this decade.

Navvy Jack had applied for, and received, the Crown Grant of his land from the Government on October 28, 1890. He now had full title to his property to dispose of as he wished. On Aug. 10, 1891 North Vancouver was declared a municipality. All of the north shore was included and the promise of a road connection seemed imminent.

1893 saw the first private subdivision of land in West Vancouver when, on July 13, Navvy Jack sold the westerly 100 acres to Edward Mahon and, about the same time, 20 acres to William Rhys-Jones, a fellow Welshman. These transactions still left him with a comfortable 40 acres surrounding his home.

* {John and Edward Mahon, who show in the record as "Gentlemen" of Cadogan Square, London, were early speculators in local land.}

In 1894 one Joseph Gill laid claim to Navvy Jacks property. In May of that year, Navvy Jack travelled to Victoria to defend his title in court. He successfully proved Gills claim fraudulent and the court ruled in favour of Thomas.

Contemporary reports indicate that Navvy Jack, who now would be about 60, borrowed money to finance a venture in Barkerville where he hoped to restore his finances. The record shows that on Aug. 7, 1894 he obtained a mortgage in the amount of \$ 1200.00 from one Mary Greet of Toronto and later of Pacific Grove, California.

Navvy Jack died suddenly in Barkerville and was buried there sometime between this date and 1905. The date of his death is not known at this time but Miss Gertrude Lawson wrote that she visited his grave there in 1913. The cemetery records no longer exist and the site of his grave is unknown today.

On Nov. 2, 1905 an order of sale was issued against his property to recover the sum of \$ 1320.00 owing on his mortgage to Mary Greet. The land was purchased from the foreclosor by local financier J.C. Keith, after whom Keith Road is named. John Lawson purchased the property from Keith in Nov. 1906 and the official transfer of land was signed on July 20, 1907. Lawson bought the Rhys-Davies portion at a tax sale and agreed to purchase the Mahon holding.

Lawson altered the house slightly with the addition of a small peaked dormer on the front and the two brick chimneys shown in early photos. The house stood about 100 feet northeast of its present location. Photographs taken about 1913 show the building a short distance east of the creek and backing on the railway grade.

The house was apparently moved to its present location at 1768 Argyle about 1921 to allow the opening of Argyle Avenue. Mahon was granted an order of foreclosure against Lawson on Sept 2, 1920 and the roadway was required to access the subdivided waterfront lots.

Emma Gertrude Macfarlane owned and rented out the house from Dec 30 1927 until March 5 1943 when it was sold to the Hookham family. The Hookhams made some alterations to the building as did the present resident after purchasing the property on Dec 30 1971.

The building is presently owned by the District of West Vancouver. A recent inspection of the house suggests that the many additions are easily identified and most of the original structure still exists. Perhaps one day Navvy Jacks many descendants will join with local residents at a ceremony dedicating the house as a heritage building.

The house, thirteen years older than the city of Vancouver, is listed in the West Vancouver Heritage Inventory as being of primary heritage importance. It is hoped that, in the future, the house will be restored to its original appearance and site in the proposed park area, perhaps as a tearoom or other public amenity. This presents a unique opportunity for a forward looking community to recognize its past.

HJ/96

GENEALOGY OF KI-APA-LA-NO

A Musqueam name.

Kay-yah-yoyk-kin, said to be grandfather of
 who had seven sons and six daughters.
 His fifth child, the wife of Puyts-maug, was
 Staw-me-qui-ya.

Puyts-maug ← half brothers

Full Squamish. His wives were Lok-y-loh
 dau of chief at Cape Mudge and two daughters
 of Chief Skulch-ahm of Nicomen.

Khay-hail-tun
 Also known as Khay-hail-tun, Khay-hail-tun
 and Kecher-hail-tun. One of his wives
 came from Nicomen. Another from
 Churchhouse, B.C. His daughter
 daughter was Lok-hu-lette, also known
 commonly known as Mary, or the Cap-
 lano Joe.

Lay-hu-lette
 Also spelled Lay-hu-lette. Also
 known as Lay-hu-lette. She was
 married to Chief Joe Capilano. It is said her
 mother came from Comox.
 A notable woman. Died in the
 1940s. Official age 23 years.

Chief Matthias Joe
 Squamish name. Mary-
 his wife's name. Said to be
 Chief in 1910. His daughter is Mary
 or Lay-hu-lette. In 1932, his son is
 known as Skulch-ahm, (see Puyts-
 maug) in 1932.
 Chief Matthias Joe born Aug. 1885

A feature is that marriages appear
 to have been between men and women from
 different Cape Mudge, Capilano, Cheslatta,
 Chilliwack, Comox, Musqueam, Nicomen, Squamish,
 Sechelt, Squamish and Yale.

Lay-hu-lette, Chai-lin-ul-Lanah, Antone
 half brother to
 Khay-hail-tun.
 Squamish
 said to have been
 followed as a
 murderer and
 shot by his own
 people. The two
 brothers were sons
 of the two sisters

Chief Capilano
 Also known as Lay-hu-lette.
 Married Lay-hu-lette and Chief Joe Capilano.
 Chief Joe Capilano, grand nephew of Chief
 Lay-hu-lette, and lived at Capilano Ck.
 It is said that his father was a Chinaman.
 That his parents were from Yale to Pemberton,
 and came over the mountains to Squamish.
 That they died when he was young and that his
 uncle raised him. In his own household he
 built a church at Nicomech, and as his
 wife was near in blood relation to the Old Chief
 he was acceptable to the chief as Chief Lay-hu-lette's
 successor. He was an able leader and on Aug.
 12th 1906 was received in quietness by King
 Edward VII at Buckingham Palace.
 He died Dec. 11, 1910, 64 yrs.

Capilano. The name. Earliest instance
 as "Capilano Creek" upon a printed map of
 New Westminster District, 1876, issued by
 the Commissioner of Lands and Works.
 The Old Chief had two homes, one at Mus-
 queam, and one at Nicomech, a village
 on the east bank of the creek without Squ-
 amish name. Kase-e-lano was friendly and
 it is supposed the survivors honored his
 memory by naming it Capilano's creek.

A son of Puyts-maug was To-ah-half-
 brother to Lay-hu-lette, and father of "Big Sam"
 at Puyts-maug. A daughter of Puyts-
 maug married Abraham, Creeks at Capilano.
 Puyts and they had many children.

Dutchiehookahum is said to have met the first sailing
 ship at Waite Point, near Squamish, and to have been the
 father of "Old" Chief Ki-ap-e-lano. Others say "Shah-
 hup-chen, or Shah-ahp-tun was his father."

"Old" Chief Ki-ap-a-la-no

A warrior and patriarch of Musqueam whose father was Squamish and
 mother was Musqueam. He had three wives, one from Squamish, one from
 Musqueam, and a Squamish wife from Chief Skulch-ahm. He had
 two sons, one at Musqueam, his headquarters, the other at Nicomech.

Chief Lahwa

Skulch-ahm, the
 youngest son of the
 Chief, and his Squamish wife.
 He was chief from 1872 to 1893.
 In 1893 he died, and was buried
 on the north bank of the
 creek in the Musqueam
 Church at Nicomech. All his
 children died young. He was
 buried in the first graves
 ground in the first graves
 ground. 1893. His full name
 was Lahwa. Chief Lahwa died April 11,
 1893. Reported age 75.

Skulch-ahm

Skulch-ahm, the
 youngest son of the
 Chief, and his Squamish wife.
 He was chief from 1872 to 1893.
 In 1893 he died, and was buried
 on the north bank of the
 creek in the Musqueam
 Church at Nicomech. All his
 children died young. He was
 buried in the first graves
 ground in the first graves
 ground. 1893. His full name
 was Lahwa. Chief Lahwa died April 11,
 1893. Reported age 75.

Khay-hail-tun

Khay-hail-tun, the
 youngest son of the
 Chief, and his Squamish wife.
 He was chief from 1872 to 1893.
 In 1893 he died, and was buried
 on the north bank of the
 creek in the Musqueam
 Church at Nicomech. All his
 children died young. He was
 buried in the first graves
 ground in the first graves
 ground. 1893. His full name
 was Lahwa. Chief Lahwa died April 11,
 1893. Reported age 75.

Khay-hail-tun

Khay-hail-tun, the
 youngest son of the
 Chief, and his Squamish wife.
 He was chief from 1872 to 1893.
 In 1893 he died, and was buried
 on the north bank of the
 creek in the Musqueam
 Church at Nicomech. All his
 children died young. He was
 buried in the first graves
 ground in the first graves
 ground. 1893. His full name
 was Lahwa. Chief Lahwa died April 11,
 1893. Reported age 75.

Khay-hail-tun

Khay-hail-tun, the
 youngest son of the
 Chief, and his Squamish wife.
 He was chief from 1872 to 1893.
 In 1893 he died, and was buried
 on the north bank of the
 creek in the Musqueam
 Church at Nicomech. All his
 children died young. He was
 buried in the first graves
 ground in the first graves
 ground. 1893. His full name
 was Lahwa. Chief Lahwa died April 11,
 1893. Reported age 75.

Khay-hail-tun

Khay-hail-tun, the
 youngest son of the
 Chief, and his Squamish wife.
 He was chief from 1872 to 1893.
 In 1893 he died, and was buried
 on the north bank of the
 creek in the Musqueam
 Church at Nicomech. All his
 children died young. He was
 buried in the first graves
 ground in the first graves
 ground. 1893. His full name
 was Lahwa. Chief Lahwa died April 11,
 1893. Reported age 75.

Khay-hail-tun

Khay-hail-tun, the
 youngest son of the
 Chief, and his Squamish wife.
 He was chief from 1872 to 1893.
 In 1893 he died, and was buried
 on the north bank of the
 creek in the Musqueam
 Church at Nicomech. All his
 children died young. He was
 buried in the first graves
 ground in the first graves
 ground. 1893. His full name
 was Lahwa. Chief Lahwa died April 11,
 1893. Reported age 75.

"Old" Chief Ki-ap-e-lano ended his days respected and full of years, 187-
 his son Lahwa succeeded him as chief. But Lahwa had displeased the Roman
 Catholic priests in being on the north shore to improve the state of the Squamish.
 He was too fond of the floating bowl; in 1875 or 1876, Lahwa was baptized and
 married in the Wesleyan Methodist Church on the south shore by Rev. Mr. J. J. J.
 Ki-ap-e-lano's daughter, Lahwa had "displeased" himself by marrying without
 his father's consent. His son Khay-hail-tun was Musqueam born, and of a Musqueam
 wife, hence unsuitable as a chief on Burrard Inlet.
 Opposite to this family situation was that of a fine man, a good
 leader, with a good wife a half-granddaughter of the "Old" Chief, and with his own
 hands, had built a small church at Nicomech, where he lived. He was not a
 blood relation to "Old" Ki-ap-e-lano, but his wife was. The Roman Catholic
 priests saw to it that he was appointed to succeed Lahwa.
 The Musqueam family of Capilano are much increased by the bring-
 ing of their historic family name, and the meaning of it from Musqueam to Nicomech.
 It was due to a particular circumstance of naming done by white men.

Compiled between 1910 and 1911
 by Major J.S. Matthews, V.B.
 City of Richmond, B.C., Vancouver,
 British Columbia, V1V 1A1.

Genealogy of Ki-ap-a-la-no compiled by Maj. J.S. Matthews, Archivist
 from consultation with Native Elders 1932 - 1953.