

## Victoria's history: What's in a name?



By Victoria News

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When it comes to street and landmark names in Victoria, it's clear who carried the most sway.

James Douglas' name appears on everything from the city's main thoroughfare to a neighbourhood, the fringe of which his first home was built on the current site of the Royal B.C. Museum, as well as Mount Douglas (formerly known as Cedar Hill) and the fir trees so prevalent in the Pacific Northwest.

His name was previously on the body of water known as James Bay – we call it the Inner Harbour today – which extended nearly to the Church of Our Lord at Humboldt and Blanshard streets, until the section east of Government Street was filled in to build the Empress Hotel and Crystal Garden.

Then there's his namesake elementary school in the heart of the Fairfield neighbourhood, named for Douglas' original acreage, known in Hudson's Bay Company settlement parlance as a "farm."

Danda Humphries, author of the book series *On the Street Where You Live*, likes to compare Douglas, the city's founder and chief factor for the HBC's Fort Victoria, with Richard Blanshard, the first colonial governor of Vancouver Island.

Douglas was a lifelong company man, Humphries says, a person who worked his way up the ladder and was entrusted with establishing a trading post on the southern tip of the island. So, when the position of governor came up in 1849, she says, "Douglas assumed he was going to get the job."

To avoid any potential conflict of interest with Douglas, say some sources, Britain instead appointed Blanshard, a 31-year-old lawyer and nobleman who had served in the army.

At that point, Douglas was in control of virtually everything concerning the fledgling settlement and further afield, and he apparently made Blanshard's life miserable. The chief factor did, however, have a home built for his rival on the current site of the Bay Centre, across from the fort's east gate.

The pathway between the structures became known as Government Street. It was eventually extended southward to the waterfront, past Douglas' home, with the development of the city's first residential neighbourhood, the aforementioned James Bay.

Blanshard lasted less than two years on the job before heading back to England, where he ultimately retired to his family estate known, ironically, as Fairfield.

When looking at the substantiveness of the region's two main thoroughfares today, Humphries says, Blanshard Street ends at the Uptown development, while "Douglas goes right through town and all across the country" as part of the Trans-Canada Highway.

Blanshard's name is on a Ministry of Health building at Pandora Avenue and Blanshard Street. But aside from the street that becomes the Pat Bay Highway, he is largely forgotten in the history of Victoria.

That is, unlike Douglas, who is buried along with various family members in a prominently marked spot in Ross Bay Cemetery.

### **Go exploring around Victoria**

Besides Douglas and Blanshard streets, the city's other major north-south roadways honour explorers George Vancouver, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra and James Cook.

Where those thoroughfares helped lay the framework for an expanding business and residential district, the very first streets were named for utilitarian purposes: Fort Street, Wharf Street and Government Street.

Fort Street began as a pathway between the west and east gates of Fort Victoria in the 1840s.

"It used to end at what is now Oak Bay Junction," says Humphries, referring to the confluence of Oak Bay Avenue, Fort Street and Pandora Avenue.

It linked up with another trail that led to Cadboro Bay Farm, owned by Hudson's Bay Company factor John Tod, and further, to the aboriginal village on the farm's namesake.

In later years, as more wagon traffic travelled to the eastern shores of the south tip of the Island, Fort was further extended to Foul Bay Road, where Cadboro Bay Road began.

It's like following a thread; every name leads to another and another.

Cadboro Bay? It was named for the first ship that brought James Douglas here to scope out a site for a new HBC fort on the West Coast.

### **Gentlemen farmers grew the new city**

As the town grew and more streets were built – laid out chiefly by surveyor Joseph Despard Pemberton (his namesake street is off Fort Street) – the names of key personnel at the fort, as well as important figures in Britain, came into play.

Of the streets and roadways drawing their names from early HBC landowners or the "farms" themselves, Douglas was the most notable. His property, nearest the fort and with a home on the current site of the Royal B.C. Museum, was Fairfield Farm.

His highest-ranking officers settled on large plots of land which extended from the fort in all directions and ultimately helped push the boundaries of the new settlement.

Examples were Hillside farm (owned by John Work, whose real name was Wark, for whom a short street off Hillside is named), Pemberton's Gonzales farm (Gonzales Bay and road), Cloverdale Farm (owned by William Fraser Tolmie, of Mount Tolmie and Tolmie Avenue), Ross Farm, owned by widow Isabella Ross (Ross Bay, the cemetery, Ross Street) and McNeill farm (McNeill Bay and road; owned by William Henry McNeill, captain of the SS *Beaver*, which brought Douglas here to stay).

Heading west there was Viewfield Farm, overseen by Donald Macauley, which encompasses what is now Victoria West; and Thomas Skinner's Constance Cove Farm, which comprised most of today's Esquimalt. Colwood Farm's master was Edward Langford and to the north was Craigflower Farm, operated by Kenneth McKenzie.

Today we find these names on streets that essentially follow the original pathways that ran through or led to their properties, or on settlements that developed over the years.

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