

## An Oral History of the Bowker Creek Watershed Lands\*

Collated by Adam Mjolsness  
from the stories of Betty Doherty, Doug McColl and Ken and Ev Middleton  
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The earliest available written accounts of Bowker Creek involve descriptions of the first settlers of Oak Bay. Two of these people, John Tod and John Sylvester Bowker, are often associated with the creek now because of their names: the watercourse was once named “Tod’s Stream” on an 1855 Hudson’s Bay Company map,<sup>13</sup> and now is named after John Tod’s son-in-law, John Bowker, to whom Tod gave 200 acres of farmland in Oak Bay (the farmhouse still stands on Heron Street).<sup>14</sup> The creek had also been known by the name “Thames River,” as recorded in 1861 by a guest of James Douglas’.<sup>14</sup> As well, Oak Bay municipal documents from as late as 1912 call the Shelbourne Valley the “Thames Valley.”<sup>15</sup>

Pre-dating this European pioneer history, of course, was use of the creek by the Straits Coast Salish peoples. Many First Nations artifacts have been uncovered from a midden in Fireman’s Park associated with the shellfish beds along Willows Beach. For these peoples, the creek would likely have been a source of drinking water and salmon.<sup>14</sup>

By the early 1900s, what is now the townsite of Oak Bay was being steadily converted from farmland to houses, and the large ravine where Bowker Creek joined the ocean was used as a garbage dump.<sup>15</sup> However, a person walking up the length of the watercourse would soon leave the bustle of town and enter a less-developed area. For several decades, here on the outskirts of Oak Bay, stood Willows Fairground--a popular place with the local children who could afford the entrance fare:

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\* This is an excerpt from an oral history project done for Environmental Studies 428: Ethnographic Methods, taught by Dr. Wendy Wickwire at the University of Victoria. For more information, the author can be contacted by email at [adammjol@uvic.ca](mailto:adammjol@uvic.ca).

<sup>13</sup> Mason, Janet. In newspaper article collected by Saanich Environmental Services department (publication and date unknown), entitled “Bowker Creek Background Discovered.” Mason was employed by the Geographical Names Office of the former provincial Environment Ministry.

<sup>14</sup> Friends of Bowker Creek website, history page. Accessed February 11, 2003 from [http://members.shaw.ca/virtual/bowkerweb/History\[1\].htm](http://members.shaw.ca/virtual/bowkerweb/History[1].htm).

<sup>15</sup> Murdoch, G. 1968. A History of the Municipality of Oak Bay. Accessed March 14, 2003 from <http://www.district.oak-bay.bc.ca/commun/murdoch.pdf>.

*Adam: I was wondering about this, the Exhibition Grounds. Do you have any memories of that?*

*Betty: Yeah, yeah. There's Fair Street down there and the reason it's Fair Street is because that's where the fair was! Yeah, it was a great place. So the big exhibition buildings, you know, and then they'd have all the rides, which was the important part. [laughs] Once a year this would all happen. And they'd put on a special streetcar, Number 11, that would take you there. And uh, you know, extra because most people were going in that...by those means. Yeah, then you'd walk up what's now Fair Street and there it was.*

*A: Wow, cool. So it was just once a year that the carnival came to town?*

*B: Um, yes. I'm sure it was just once a year. But these very big buildings where they'd have, you know, cows and they'd have fruit and, you know, all the things exhibitions have. And my mother won first prize for an outfit she knit for my cousin. [both laugh] But that was great. There was a sports centre, used to go there--teenagers now—go to all the lacrosse games and basketball games. It was a great place. So that whole subdivision where Lansdowne School is, the whole subdivision there, that would have been part of the fairgrounds originally.*

Doug was able to give me some information on when and why the Exhibition Grounds were replaced with the subdivision:

*Doug: The horse races and everything there. That's the track. That's the grandstand. [points at map] Now this is all built up. The houses...it's a subdivision. When they put this subdivision in, they took over the Exhibition Grounds. That's all houses in there.*

*Adam: Oh yeah. Do you know when that would have been about?*

*D: ... I'm going to gamble... I would have said in the middle to late '40s, into the early '50s. It's hard to say, but that's the era.*

*A: Mm hmm. How come they got rid of it? It wasn't being used anymore?*

*D: Oh, it was being used, but I guess this talks, doesn't it? [rubs index finger and thumb together]*

*A: Yeah, yeah. It sounds like that was a pretty common occurrence during those years, eh?*

*D: Yeah. You know, there was no work. And as you know, wages were pretty slim.*

Financial issues were likely also a main reason for development of the Hillside/Shelbourne area further upstream from the Exhibition Grounds. At one time, the area in between the two was all fields:

*Adam: And do you remember there being any farms or anything between here and Oak Bay, or was it...was it all pretty much buildings as it is now?*

*Betty: In my memory, it all seemed to be fields. You know, you run through a field, jump the ditch, and run through the next field. ...I didn't go that way that much. Muriel and I wandered...we thought we'd follow the creek one time, you know, we thought we'd wandered fifty miles from home! We were probably two miles. ...So, uh, as far as the geography of it or anything, you know, I didn't really question that. Just kind of messed around. Lots of fields to play in...there used to be a cow in this field down here [southwest], and then when they'd take the cow away, we'd...Muriel and I'd get the droppings for our dads' gardens, you know. [laughs]*

*A: Oh wow...good idea! Yeah.*

*B: So it was very...quite rural.*

A bit further north of this area was a tributary of Bowker Creek that flowed southwest from McRae's farm (where the Cedar Hill Golf Course is now).

*Doug: That was all McRae's farm.*

*Adam: Oh wow. What kind of farm did he have?*

*D: They raised cows. Milk. ...*

*A: Hmm. So there was a farm and a golf club, right beside each other?*

*D: Uh, yeah. But the golf course never went a-way back where it does now. That was all his range land. Okay, you know if you're standing down at the [Cedar Hill] Rec Centre here—facing it—there's a house up on the hill, a great big house up on the hill, all by itself. You ever noticed it?*

*A: No, I haven't noticed.*

*D: Okay. You go down and ask for McCrae's farm...house. Now that's right in the golf course area.*

*A: Huh. Is that on the west or the north side of the Rec Centre there?*

*D: Yeah...if you stand down on Cedar Hill Road here, and look at the Rec Centre, you'll notice on your right, there's a great big house sitting up in there. It's a museum now. ... The foot path around the golf course, it goes right to it. ...*

*A: Oh yeah. So the back area where King's Pond is and all that, that was all grazing land?*

*D: That was grazing land. That's another place we used to up to—King's Pond over there—to play. Yeah. But that's...there was no golf course there then. And the original club house is still*

*up here, seems to me. I didn't...I wasn't never a golfer, so I'm just going by what people tell me. The original club house for that thing is still up there. Somebody's just using it as a house.*

Betty also has memories of the McRae family and their land. She used to play baseball with their sons and go skating on King's Pond at the north end of the present-day golf course:

*Betty: In my mind I thought that that's where it [Bowker Creek] began. I guess because there was a big pond there. I guess there's still a pond there. But we used to go—we called it King's Pond—  
So it would freeze over once in a great while, and so it was up to King's Pond! Where you stayed until you were frozen solid, then you said, 'I've got to go home!' You know how far that is when you're frozen?*

*Adam: Yeah, that's a long way!*

*B: And again, me walking home with Muriel, and my brother who was not sympathetic at all—four years older—and I'm drizzling away, 'Ohhhhhhhh....' And my brother told me, 'Stop it, your face will stay that way,' you know, 'cause it was cold. 'Thank you!', my brother. [both laugh]*

*A: That's funny. Oh, I wondered if King's Pond was a built pond or if it was natural.*

*B: Yeah, it's a natural pond, yep.*

*A: Hmm. Were there many ducks in it then as there are now?*

*B: Well, mostly when I went there it was winter, so no ducks on it then. Kids skating on it and sliding on it. I found out what you never do is try and roller-skate on ice. One step on it and away I went and I nearly knocked myself cuckoo...right in the back of my head. Saw stars.*

*A: Wow. Yeah, I've fallen like that on ice too.*

*B: Oh, God. Didn't have ice skates so I thought, 'Well, maybe these will do.' Wrong!*

However, fields and farms did not cover the whole area. At the Cedar Hill/Hillside intersection (to where a young frozen Betty walked back home that day) was the location of Lum's Grocery Store, a butcher, a gas station and the terminus of a streetcar to downtown. Heading east from there were fields in which horses and cows grazed, Garry Oak trees grew, and the main Bowker Creek flowed along Doncaster Street. On the east side of Bowker Creek at Doncaster--where the Hillside Mall is today--was Oaklands Nursery and a large vegetable garden owned by a Chinese family:

*Adam: When were they developed over...when did the mall go in there?*

*Doug: It had to be...the late '50s. Early '60s, in around there. 'Cause I knew a fellow who used to live down on Edgeware, and then they had to tear his house down to get in. So I would...give or take somewhere around there. You should be able to get all that from the City Hall, though, when the building permits were taken out.*

*A: Yeah...yeah, that's a good idea. Hmm. So what did they grow at the nursery there?*

*D: Trees and everything. They didn't go in for...they went for fruit trees and all that kind of stuff, but not too much in the way of vegetables and that kind of stuff, because the Chinese gardens was right next door to 'em.*

*A: Right. And they grew mostly vegetables?*

*D: They grew...vegetables, yeah. That was right at the end of Scott Street. If you drove off the end of Scott Street you'd have drove right into their house, the Chinese.*

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*A: So, it was mostly fields then, around that area, but it was still a commercial centre, kind of, around the Shelbourne and Hillside intersection?*

*D: Um...there was Grant's Grocery Store, there was a service station, and there was a welding shop. And it turned into be a dry-cleaner's place afterwards. But by that time I was grown up...I wasn't down in that area, so I couldn't tell exactly what all went on, but I know... All that came out. Except, well, Grant's Store was there for donkey's years.*

*A: Hmm. Was that a convenience store...a market..?*

*D: It was just a grocery store. It would be on the south east side of Shelbourne. Lansdowne [School], around there.*

The southeast corner of the Hillside/Shelbourne intersection is now Lansdowne School. In the early days, however, it used to be a dairy and flying field (“Victoria International Airport”!) owned by a man named Eves. The planes would fly in southbound with the prevailing winds to land on the field. There were two hangars on the property, one near the intersection and one further east in which hay was stored for many years after the planes stopped flying and before the school was put in.

A tributary of Bowker Creek flowed westward to the Hillside/Shelbourne intersection from the area of the Normal School (now Camosun College), a teachers' school. That tributary is now culverted underneath Lansdowne Road, but used to be a four-foot ditch where Doug would catch frogs as a child. It was a much friendlier creek

for a child to play in than the main Bowker Creek watercourse at Doncaster and Hillside, which was about eight feet deep and not a gentle fall:

*Betty: But this big deep ditch on Hillside...there was no sidewalk, down that way [points east]. So there was a railing that came along and when you're a child it looks [indicates that it came up quite high compared to a child's body]. So of course we had to walk on it, you know...it was about this wide [thin as a rail]. Well I messed up. And I went down into this...it was a very deep ditch and it drained into Bowker Creek...it was part of the runoff there...and it was dry because it was summer. And I nearly killed myself. Knocked all the wind out of myself. I couldn't breathe! And I had to get all the way home. Ugh...*

This story provides evidence for the concerns of certain parents of the day, who advocated filling in the ditches that housed Bowker Creek's many tributaries. Ken and Ev related similar sentiments concerning a tributary near their house which also flowed westward from the Normal School, but further north than Doug's Lansdowne tributary; this one was around Derby Street:

*Ev: I know Bowker Creek used to overflow on Shelbourne Street. Kids drowned in it.*

*Adam: Really!*

*Ken: Kids drowned in it?*

*E: Oh yeah. Yeah. 'Cause it was a big, big ditch. It used to come back behind here.*

*K: It shows it coming down Shelbourne Street. Now this was a tributary of it here, but we had a... When we first moved here, there was 10-foot [high] ditch there.*

*A: Really! Where's that?*

*E: Behind us.*

*K: Right along the property line.*

*A: Oh, okay—that went down to Shelbourne?*

*K: Yeah. It went down to North Dairy, actually. Then it likely went down to Shelbourne.*

*E: Down to Shelbourne. And they finally filled it in.*

*K: We had it filled in with a... Local Improvement, we—all the people in the area joining the ditch—paid to have it tiled in.*

*A: Hmm. When was that, about?*

*K: It was not long after we moved here, so that was...*

*E: About 45 years ago.*

*K: About 45 years ago, yeah.*

*A: So why did people want to fill it in?*

*K: Oh, because it used to flood all the time! It used to... Because the growth would... All the grass would grow up and the weeds and everything, and unless they cleaned it out, which they did...*

*E: And they had muskrats in it.*

*K: Yeah, so people wanted to get rid of the problem. The people behind us—we didn't flood; we were higher than them—but the people behind us used to flood. It used to flow that way. Until they tiled it in, then of course the water I guess flowed easier, and they were able to take the water away.*

*A: Right. So do you know whereabouts it started—that tributary?*

*K: It comes across the street between the houses from Richmond Road. Because when they built the new addition to the Camosun College, they put in a building in there, and they fed water down to our ditch. That's after it was tiled in. And they thought the tile was three feet, I think. And it was only 30 inches. And they caused it to start to flood down at the end there. And of course all the neighbours started blowing their stacks because they'd paid for that to go in there. And they had to put another drain down Frechette Street down towards North Dairy to take up the overload of water that they'd forced into it by putting a tile ditch from the school.*

Flooding was an issue of great concern for residents along Bowker Creek in the days before the watercourse was 'tiled in' (diverted to run through concrete culverts). In recent times, most flood events have been associated with the area near St. Patrick's School at Trent Street, or at North Dairy by Hillside Mall. These have primarily been due to problems with storm drain construction and maintenance, and such problems are increasingly rare as improvements are made. However, in the early days, flooding of Bowker Creek was a common occurrence, especially at the intersection of Shelbourne and Cedar Hill Cross Road where floods would often create a lake from Cedar Hill Cross Road to Mortimer Street:

*Ev: And that's where it flooded here—across Shelbourne Street. ... The whole farm and everything just under water.*

*Ken: Yep. And any time there was a heavy rain, you could depend, it could likely be closed off, that corner. So you'd better find another way home.*

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*K: And it wasn't just minor flooding, it was serious flooding, every time it happened. Because you couldn't put the water anywhere because the area the water was supposed to going...*

*E: It was waist deep!*

*K: Yeah. It would be over the top of the wheels of the cars at those intersections. That's why you didn't even gamble, you didn't even try. ...Unless you were dumb.*

*E: Oh, cars got stuck.*

*K: Oh sure—because they'd try it!*

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*K: Well, I think where they did it [diverted the watercourse to run through a cement tile culvert], that's how they stopped the flooding. Better drainage.*

*Adam: Right. So just...tiles would make the water move faster so it would get out of there...*

*K: Oh sure. Nothing to hold the water back. Whereas if they didn't tile it in...*

*E: There's all the debris and everything that collected.*

*K: Yeah, if they cleaned it out every year it likely wouldn't have happened. But they couldn't afford to clean it out every year--too long an area.*

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*A: Hmm. Wow. So by 'tiling in,' I'm not sure what you mean by that. They just put like three-foot tiles...*

*K: Tiles. Great big concrete tiles.*

*A: In a tunnel, kinda, shape?*

*K: Like a tunnel, sure. Yeah. And then no growth gets up the sides, it's all nice and smooth inside. There might be some dirt in the bottom, but the sides are nice and smooth. Nothing slows the water down.*

Preventing floods at the Shelbourne/Cedar Hill Cross Road intersection was of particular importance, even in the early days. Ev spoke of her father helping construct Shelbourne Street before 1910, in the "horse and buggy days" when big rocks were

hauled with horses and skids. It was likely used as a main thoroughfare from then on, replacing the older Cedar Hill Road route.

The Shelbourne/Cedar Hill Cross Road intersection used to be called Hunter's Corner, because of Hunter's Store, a two-storey post office/grocery store/residence owned by George and Maude Hunter (of Maude Hunter's Pub fame) which stood at the southeast corner of the intersection where a bank and A&W are now. On the northeast side of the intersection was Howroyd's dairy and private airfield, and on the south side was Rendle's farm. A Chinese family owned a market garden near there, and Jennings' daffodil farm occupied much of the remaining land in the square between Cedar Hill Cross Road, McKenzie Avenue, Shelbourne Street, and east to Gordon Head Road. A florists' shop currently located in the plaza at the northeast corner of Shelbourne/Cedar Hill Cross Road intersection may be associated with the old Jennings' daffodil farm.

Before the 1930s, the post office had been located at the southwest corner of Cedar Hill/Cedar Hill Cross Road intersection, where the Lutheran Church now stands. It was operated out of the house of a man who had no legs, and when he died the post office was moved to Hunter's Store. St. Luke's Church on the northwest corner of that intersection was there even before that, and the cemetery behind it retains the Garry Oak trees, wildflowers and rocky outcroppings that likely characterised the area before development.

Further east along Cedar Hill Cross Road, past Hunter's Corner, was St. Aidan's Church and Hall. The church has been relocated to a nearby location, but the hall still remains intact. Directly across the street from there, where the monstrous Fraser Tolmie Apartment building now stands, used to be the site of the old CCF Hall (Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, precursor to the New Democratic Party). Just behind there is Mount Tolmie, on the slopes of which Betty as a child used to play and collect lilies, and where Ev's mother once had an early-morning surprise:

*Ev: If you want to go way back to 1910 or '11, my mother used to go over Mt. Tolmie to come to the University School here.*

*Ken: Which is right here. So now you know how old that building is.*

*E: She met a cougar!*

*K: She met a cougar going over the mountain!*

*Adam: Wow!*

*E: Going to work. 'Cause she used to be a seamstress at the University School.*

*A: Wow. So was there a road over the hill, or was she just walking...?*

*K: No, there was a pathway over the hill. There's a road now.*

*E: There's a road now, 'cause my dad put that in.*

*A: Wow!*

*K: But I think the roadway follows the path, because that roadway is, you know, it isn't straight.*

Leaving Mt. Tolmie and going further upstream along the creek's path on Shelbourne Street, one would pass by the sites of Turner's farm and Ross' house and arrive at the current Shelbourne/McKenzie intersection. Before the 1960s, however, the scene looked completely different from the University Heights Shopping Centre that stands there today. And McKenzie Street wasn't even called McKenzie, but Ruby Road:

*Ken: The creek ... comes down from McKenzie Avenue down Shelbourne Street. Shelbourne and McKenzie...that used to be Ruby Road; McKenzie never went through at one time.*

*Adam: Really?...Ruby Road.*

*K: Ruby Road went as far as Cedar Hill. Ruby Road. And then there was a big hill—big rock, and the road stopped and McKenzie Avenue started the other side of the Cedar Hill. I guess this is Cedar Hill here [points on map]. And it cut off at Cedar Hill and then started again way down in the Braefoot here. But there was a gap in it.*

*A: Wow, a big rock, eh?*

*K: Until the university went in.*

*A: Oh, okay. And then they blasted the rock out or something?*

*K: Yeah, they blasted the rock out and drove the road through.<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup> I speculate that this is why the shopping centre at that site is now called University "Heights".

On the rocky hill to the west of that still stands an old stone heritage house, the residence of one of the original settlers in the Gordon Head area:

*Ken: There's a big stone house. It's still there!*

*Ev: It's a heritage house. That was Grandpa Irvine's house.*

*K: It's one of the Irvines', that big stone house which is—coming from the university—just as you cross Cedar Hill Road, you look about half a block, if you look to your right up high, you'll see the old stone house still sitting there.*

The whole Gordon Head area was farmland, and the Shelbourne/McKenzie intersection was known as the Cedar Plain, part of the 100-acre Rosebank Farm established by the Scottish settlers John and Jessie Irvine in 1857. The farm eventually grew to be 300 acres, and the Irvine family farmed the area for 50 years.<sup>17</sup>

Ev recalls that the Irvines were related to many of the other families in the area, such as the Dawsons and the Scotts. The Dawsons' house stood at the current location of the Nellie McClung Library on the southwest corner of Cedar Hill/McKenzie intersection. The Scotts' house is one of the few original houses remaining in that area, and it is tucked away between the Shell gas station and the big new apartment complex on the northeast side of the McKenzie/Shelbourne intersection. The Scott property has many trees on it, which are noticeable even at a distance as the only stand of Douglas Fir in that highly urbanised area. The property is still owned by the Scott family, and the Scott children with whom Ev grew up still live there:

*Ev: That was a grocery store where the gas station [Shell] is. And then the Scott kids—he wouldn't sell it, the boy. And the daughter, her sister's had a stroke and they both lived together. They never married. The brother and sister live there still.*

*Ken: The brother and sister live together, still in the same house they were born in.*

*Adam: In the house just in behind the...*

*K: Yeah, there in the bush, sort of. In the big trees.*

*E: There's a bus stop in front of 'em? Okay, well that's their house. And they've been there for eons too.*

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<sup>17</sup> Friends of Bowker Creek website, history page. Accessed February 11, 2003 from [http://members.shaw.ca/virtual/bowkerweb/History\[1\].htm](http://members.shaw.ca/virtual/bowkerweb/History[1].htm).

*A: Wow!*

*K: Yeah, their dad built the house. He was a contractor.*

The houses east of there along McKenzie Avenue were owned by the Libby, Lindley and Parkins families, which I suspect it is these very ones that are the dilapidated houses scheduled to be demolished with the construction of the planned “Tuscan Village” shopping centre and apartment complex.

The southeast corner of that intersection, where the Petro-Can gas station now stands, was a gas station even in the early days. To the east of it, along the south side of McKenzie, was old Mrs. Sault’s house (who had a well from which Ev used to pump water) and the Creases’ house.

On the southwest side of the intersection used to be vegetable gardens owned by Chinese families. They would sell their produce to their neighbours in the area:

*Ev: Well I know the section between in Shelbourne and Hunter’s Corner right behind...right close to Ruby Road, they were all Chinese gardens.*

*Adam: Oh really. What did they grow in the gardens?*

*E: Vegetables. Then they had little shacks there, how they didn’t burn up, I don’t know. And I mean shacks. They had little stove-pipes comin’ out the top...*

*Ken: Yeah, real ‘Chinese-y’ type place.*

*A: Wow. Huh. So what would have been the main area that they would bring their vegetables to sell, from there?*

*E: ... Well, they’d come down Shelbourne Street, part way, and...right in that area [SW corner of Shelbourne and McKenzie intersection] would be all these Chinese vegetable gardens.*

*K: Where would they sell them? They went door to door, mostly, didn’t they?*

*E: Yeah, they peddled them. ...They had old trucks...*

*K: They peddled them! Yeah. Yeah. Everybody waited for the...*

*E: ...trucks to come.*

*K: Was it once a week or twice a week?*

*E: Yeah, once a week I would think.*

*K: They'd buy their groceries... Don't forget it was very difficult to get to town.*

*E: Well, if you went to town, you got the bus there at the corner of McKenzie and Shelbourne, you caught the Gordon Head bus. You went to town in the morning, you couldn't get back home until twenty after two in the afternoon. They only had about two or three buses a day.*

These were the days of limited transportation. Even getting to Cordova Bay was sometimes a complicated affair:

*Ken: Well the regional buses were run by Pacific Coach Lines. The ones that run up-Island. That was a long-distance run, from Gordon Head to town.*

*Adam: Wow!*

*K: And the same as out...going out Quadra Street. The buses ran as far as Lake Hill... ... And if you lived out in Royal Oak you had to catch a Pacific Coast Lines bus. Because that was long distance.*

*Ev: If we wanted to go to the beach at Cordova Bay...we'd have to wait for the bus coming from town and if it was full they'd pass you up and you'd be all ready to go to the beach and you couldn't go!*

*K: You couldn't go 'cause there was only one bus going to the beach.*

*E: ...And when we were little we used to walk from McKenzie to Mt. Doug Park to go to the beach.*

*A: Wow. The beach down at Mt. Doug there.*

*K: Down the hill, yeah. Down by the cliff.*

*E: No, we didn't have all the conveniences you people have today!*

*A: Yeah, that's for sure.*

*K: That's why McMorran's was actually at one time a long ways out of town. Now people treat it as if it's not very far at all. But in those days, when you didn't have any transportation, you either had to get a bus or walk...*

The Gordon Head area where Ev grew up was famous for its farms and greenhouses. Rose and Ed Lum--the latter a former mayor of Saanich--used to live where the University Heights Shopping Centre now stands, and their relative "Auntie" Lum grew tomatoes and cucumbers in her greenhouse across the street at the site of a

new apartment complex. There used to be a dairy farm where the Canadian Tire now stands at the north end of the shopping centre, a chicken farm run by the Hills family at the current site of UVic's Ian Stewart Complex near the Gordon Head Road/McKenzie intersection. The Norsworthy family home stood across Gordon Head Road from the Hills' chicken farm, the McPherson family lived in a stone-foundation house on the north side of McKenzie Avenue between Gordon Head Road and Shelbourne, and the Cousins family next door owned a flower garden and sold bulbs.

Agriculture and horticulture were very important to the area's economy in the early days. Betty recalls her own teenage summer employment at a greenhouse in the Gordon Head area:

*Betty: ...I was 13, just turning 14 in the summer... going to start high school. Earning my first bike. Before that I'd had my brother's old one which I loved. Wide handlebars...boy's bike—more fun. And... [both laugh] well I thought starting high school I should have, you know [ahem], a girl's bike. So I um, all summer I rode my brother's bike out to...way out Shelbourne, way out there ... Gordon Head, with a couple of my friends. And we dis-budded chrysanthemums... you know, to get the big flower you take the side buds off and therefore you can get the big one. And that's what we were doing.*

*Adam: Wow. As a part-time job?*

*B: Yeah. We didn't pick berries, we did this instead. Dollar a day. So I earned my \$20 bike that summer.*

Berry farms were another common feature of the local landscape. Black currants grew near Bowker Creek in the property owned by the Jennings family. The Pease family had a berry farm at the east end of the UVic campus, and an old water tower (part of their jam factory) still stands at the edge of campus on Sinclair Road just before it descends to Cadboro Bay.

Ethnobotanist Nancy Turner has written of the historical abundance of berries and wildlife at the UVic campus:

*Fort Victoria residents from the mid-1800s speak of encountering - and hunting - herds of deer at Gordon Head, and before that, elk and wolves as well as bear and cougar. Salish elders, too, remember their parents and grandparents coming to hunt and pick berries in this area.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> Turner, N. J. April 2000. "Wild habitats of UVic's campus." School of Environmental Studies.

The Garry Oak meadow at the southwestern edge of the UVic campus used to be owned by the Hudson's Bay Company. Before that it had been a site where the First Nations peoples would come to gather camas bulbs for food. In fact, the word "Camosun" means "place to gather camas". The Mt. Tolmie area, near the site of Camosun College and the Normal School before it, was likely one of these camas-harvesting areas.

I was not able to determine whether the Bowker Creek Headwaters at the UVic campus was originally a wetland or not. Doug thought it was, but Ken couldn't remember, and neither man claimed to have spent much time exploring the campus area as a youth. Ken had lived in the old army huts on the campus (some still stand east of the playing fields), but he had not taken too much notice of the natural ecosystems there:

*Ken: The army huts were used for veterans, when they came back. There was not enough housing, they used it for emergency. I lived there for a few years with my dad, when he came back from the Air Force.*

*Adam: Hmm. ... So how old would you have been at that time?*

*K: Oh I was 20, 21. Yeah.*

*A: So were you too old for exploring the area around there...the bush or anything...?*

*K: Oh...I don't know what we thought. I thought I was out in Timbuktu, that's what I thought, because there was no houses or nothing!*

*Ev: He came from Winnipeg. It was a city!*

*K: Well we were in the prairies. To see anything in Winnipeg, where there was no houses or anything, you were out in the farmland. Well you were right in town practically, and you were still in the farmland in Victoria. So it was strange.*

*A: Hmm. So what do you remember about that area? Did you ever go for walks or anything? Like, can you describe what it was like when you were 20?*

*K: No, it was mainly...*

*E: Huts.*

*K: Mainly army huts. On land with nothing...*

*E: There was nothing there*

*K: Nothing much on the land. We used to play on the fields... Football, soccer... Just playing around.*

UVic students still play soccer on the fields beside the old army huts, but now even some of these playing fields are being replaced by new buildings. The “wild space” at campus where Doug would go on occasion to get Christmas trees now makes up what is the largest unprotected Douglas Fir forest in Victoria. Neglected for many years, these campus woods have become infested with invasive species that choke out the native vegetation and contribute to the common image of the forests as worthless “scrubland.” These campus green spaces, like Bowker Creek, are largely unnoticed and under-appreciated. It is time to raise awareness of our communities’ valuable natural and cultural heritage.