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"BEYOND THE NORTH WEST ARM"

A LOCAL HISTORY OF
WILLIAMS' LAKE
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

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for the
Williams' Lake Conservation Company

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Opposite my house on the western shore of the North West Arm there rises a barren rock called Mount Misery which I visited. It was night, there was not a cloud in the sky. The moon shone with marvellous lustre. Down in front of us lay the long arm of the sea that ran between us and the city. ...On the left hand all was wilderness; on the right, close by, was a small lake which seemed like a sheet of silver in the moon's rays.

James De Mille
Cord and Crease
1869

THE BEGINNINGS

When the edge of the last glacier slowly retreated across Nova Scotia 11,000 years ago it left a desolate landscape behind it. The granite bedrock was pitted and scoured by debris carried along by the ice, any soil cover that may have existed was removed and huge boulders and rocks dropped by the melting glacier littered the barrens. Mount Misery, the bare granite hill which James De Mille's hero climbed, and from which he looked down upon Williams' Lake, is typical of the area.

Over the centuries the rock was partially covered by mosses and lichens while bracken, blueberry and huckleberry bushes filled the shallow pockets of soil. Along the streams which tumbled down into Williams' Lake from the chain of lakes above, forests became established, only to be wiped out again and again by recurring forest fires. The water teemed with fish, and small fur-bearing animals lived in crevices of the rocks and along the shore as they do today.

For centuries the Indians visited the North West Arm each year to hold their spring festival and to spend the summer hunting and fishing along the southern shore of the province. While no Indian remains have yet been found on Williams' Lake, rumours persist of an Indian burial ground near the outlet stream and it is unlikely that the Micmacs failed to visit it in their summer wanderings.¹ The fresh water so close to their traditional gathering place would surely have attracted them. Near the mouth of the Arm at the Government Quarries, the "Indian Path" leads from "Indian Point" back to the McIntosh Runs.²

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: THE COMING OF THE ENGLISH

When Cornwallis and his men brought His Majesty's sloop of war *Sphinx* into the harbour on a beautiful June day in 1749, the days when the Indians could pursue their traditional nomadic ways were drawing to a close. Their relations with the English were not good. Raids were frequent in the early days of the town and as a result the settlers were afraid to venture outside the fortifications or to take up the large grants of land which they had been promised in the countryside. An Indian attack on the sawmills at the head of the North West Arm in the 1750's caused the deaths of three men who were buried by their comrades beside the blockhouse. Three times the bodies were dug up by the Indians, under the fire of the guard, so eager were they to secure the bounty offered by the French for English scalps.³

With the fall of Louisbourg in 1758 the Indians lost the support of their French allies, and it was only a matter of time before treaties were signed with the Nova Scotia chiefs. With the removal of the Indian threat, serious English settlement of the Halifax area could begin.

THE ORIGINAL GRANTEES

Fish lots were laid out on the North West Arm shore of the Halifax peninsula in the 1760's for those intending to pursue the fishery and one was granted to Captain Daniel Hill.⁴ On the south west shore of the Arm 200 acre farm lots stretched up through the pine woods to the large lake above. Captain Hill was granted the lot opposite his fish lot which included the outlet stream from the lake and the lake's eastern end.⁵

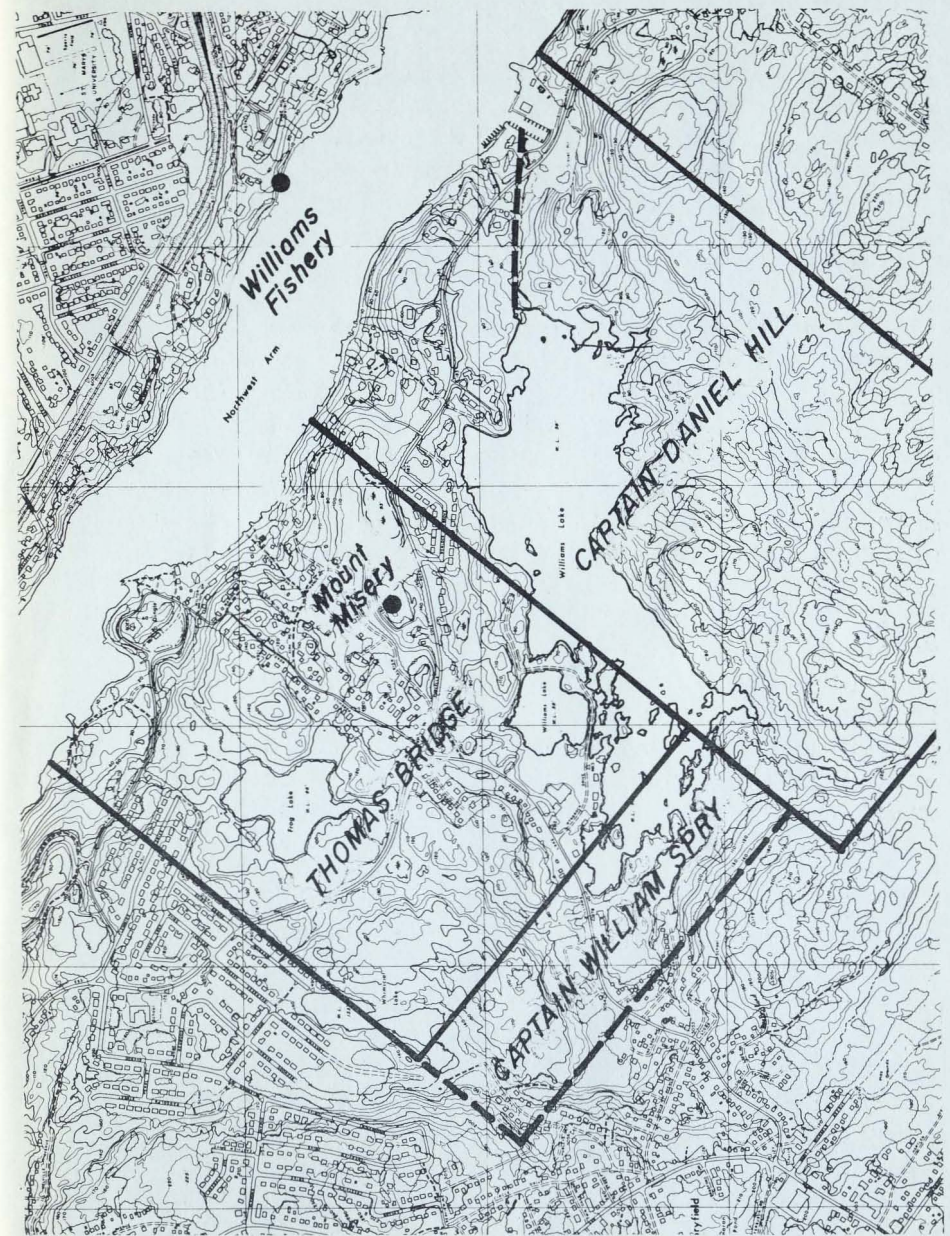
Thomas Bridge received a grant in 1771 of the adjacent lot where the Dingle park and Jollimore village now stand.⁶ Bridge was well connected in Halifax, and in addition to a seat in the House of Assembly he was a Magistrate, Justice of the Peace, Clerk of Licences, Coroner and served on the Commission of the Peace at various times during his stay in Halifax.⁷ Within two years he had built a wharf and fishing stage on the Arm shore of his grant, but he had also been forced to mortgage the whole property to the London merchant to whom he was in debt.⁸

Meanwhile, across the barren expanse of granite and slate to the south of the lake, Captain William Spry, the energetic Chief Engineer and Surveyor of the Army was amassing a vast estate by buying up the grants of several early settlers and attempting to develop a farming community on the thin, stony soil of what is now Spryfield and Harrietsfield.⁹ He petitioned the Council in 1771 and was granted 80 acres between the Bridge grant and his other lands through which ran the new road from the head of the Arm which he had built "at considerable personal expense...to encourage people to settle thereon".

These three men were the first owners of Williams' Lake and its surrounding lands but none was to remain for long. The motive of the government was to encourage the clearing of the land and its settlement, and the grants specified that three acres in every 50 must be improved, houses built or settlers established within three years if the owner was to retain his title. The owner's motive however appears to have been the quickest profit in the shortest time, and lands changed hands frequently as a result.

When Daniel Hill died his widow Elizabeth sold the 200 acre Hill grant to a land speculator, John Murphy, in 1772.¹⁰ The Hill grant and the

Bridge grant both went in 1780 to an illiterate yeoman, James Williams,¹¹ who must nevertheless have had quite a head for business, because he and his partners acquired the Hill fish lot across the Arm as well, where they operated a fishery for a number of years. In the days before refrigeration ice was an important commodity in the fish business. A military map of 1784 shows Williams' fishery, with a faint track leading up the stream from the cove on the opposite shore to Williams' Lake.¹² It is probable that Williams used the lake on his land for obtaining ice, and that it became known by his name.



APPROXIMATE LOCATIONS OF ORIGINAL GRANTS

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY:
EXPLOITATION & COMMERCIAL VENTURES

Ice, water power and stone were what the lake and its surroundings offered to the early settlers, and it was not long before its full commercial potential was being explored.

GEORGE MCINTOSH

William Spry, having made a fortune in Halifax, advised his creditors to settle up, put his estate on the market, and retired to England in 1783. His land, including Williams' Lake, came into the hands of George McIntosh, the area's first real developer.¹³ Very little is known about McIntosh. His occupation is given as "gentleman" or occasionally "farmer", and he lived from 1783 until his death in 1821 at Spryfield, presumably in the "Mansion House" that Spry had built there.¹⁴ He bought up many of the smaller grants, including that of James Williams,¹⁵ until he owned thousands of acres stretching from the Arm to Harrietsfield. For 60 years he, and then his executors, divided and subdivided this vast area, bringing in the small farmers and quarrymen whose descendents still live there.

One of the first things to which he turned his attention was the provision of a mill to provide flour and meal to his farmer settlers. In partnership with the Honourable William Cochran, M.L.A. for Halifax, he built a large grist mill at the cove where the stream from Williams' Lake enters the Arm. The stream was dammed to provide power, and a house built for the resident miller to occupy.¹⁶ When William Cochran got into debt in 1803 his half interest in the mill and the 450 acre property that went with it were mortgaged¹⁷

and in 1807 the following advertisement appeared in *The Royal Gazette*:

To be sold at the Old Court House in Halifax on the 25th of June at XII o'clock, that valuable Grist Mill erected on the North West Arm, belonging to Mr. McIntosh and Mr. Cochran. One fourth of the purchase money to be paid down on the delivery of the Deeds - a reasonable time will be allowed for the payment of the remainder which will be made known at the sale.

The mill was also available for lease by application to Mr. McIntosh in Spryfield or Mr. Cochran in Halifax.¹⁸ A map made the following year shows a narrow dotted track which eventually joined Spry's road from the head of the Arm, leading up from the mill. Short branches led off to the mill dwelling house on one side and to the dam at the head of the stream on the other.¹⁹

ROBERT LETSON

In 1811 a purchaser was finally found. In that year Robert Letson bought the 450 acres from McIntosh and Cochran and moved his family from Halifax to the mill.²⁰ He was a Loyalist who had come to Halifax after the evacuation of New York. The transports had arrived in November and December of 1783 and with 25,000 other refugees he and his family had waited out the grim winter in Halifax. Although he was given a grant of land in Chester, Robert appears to have preferred to stay in town where he practised his trade of saddler, and operated a sedan chair route from a stand on Barrington Street. Robert married three times and produced seventeen children, the last two of whom

were born at the Mill Farm, as the Letsons called their property on the Arm.²¹ When he bought the land in 1811 he retired there to run the grist mill which was "large and convenient" with two pairs of stones and extensive granaries. It was so close to the water that vessels of 200 tons could lie alongside "and discharge Cargo in the Mill with very little trouble".²² A print exists of the mill made in 1818 which shows a large three storey building with gable roof built on high foundations. A long low extension with arched supports was probably the granary.²³

Robert turned over his saddlery business in Halifax to his older son John, and William the next oldest was put in charge of a tannery at the Arm property which used the water from the outlet stream to run its bark mills.²⁴ The oaks growing in the acid soil of the watershed provided bark from which tannin was extracted for the tan pits and the leather which William prepared could be shipped to town for use in the Letson business.

The Letsons were connected by several marriages with the Howe family who lived in a cottage on the opposite shore of the Arm, directly across from the Mill Farm. Young Joseph Howe and his sister were contemporaries of the younger Letson children and the families often visited back and forth. The children must often have climbed the track beside the tumbling mill stream to visit the dam that held back the waters of the lake and provided power for all the industry below. Joe Howe loved to swim, sail and ramble the woods around the Arm and in these years he developed a deep love for this part of Nova Scotia that never left him. The huge split rock on the southern shore of the lake near the dam is still called Howe's Rock and legend says that this was his favourite retreat for solitude and meditation.²⁵ When Howe at the age of 22 purchased the *Weekly Chronicle*, the

first step in his distinguished career, his partner was 19 year old James Spike, a nephew of Mrs. Robert Letson.²⁶

Robert Letson was 53 when he moved to the Arm and he soon began to suffer the symptoms of the painful illness that resulted in his death. The mill did not bring in the expected profits and he was hard pressed to meet his obligations to Cochran's trustees who held a mortgage on the property.²⁷ When he died in 1816 his son John tried unsuccessfully to let the property, while William continued to run the tannery for a few more years. In 1821 Susannah Letson, the old Loyalist lady who had left New York in 1783 with her son, had survived the hardships of the first years in the new land, had seen two of her young daughter-in-laws die and been mother as well as grandmother to their children, herself died peacefully at the Mill Farm at the age of 86. The following year the trustees foreclosed on the mortgage of the Farm forcing Mrs. Letson and her children to leave their home.²⁸ The family decided to make a new start and departed for the promising new settlements along the Mirimichi. They must often have regretted it, for in 1826 one of the most disastrous fires of the nineteenth century swept through the Mirimichi valley, killing hundreds of people and wiping out the Letson homestead and all their possessions.²⁹

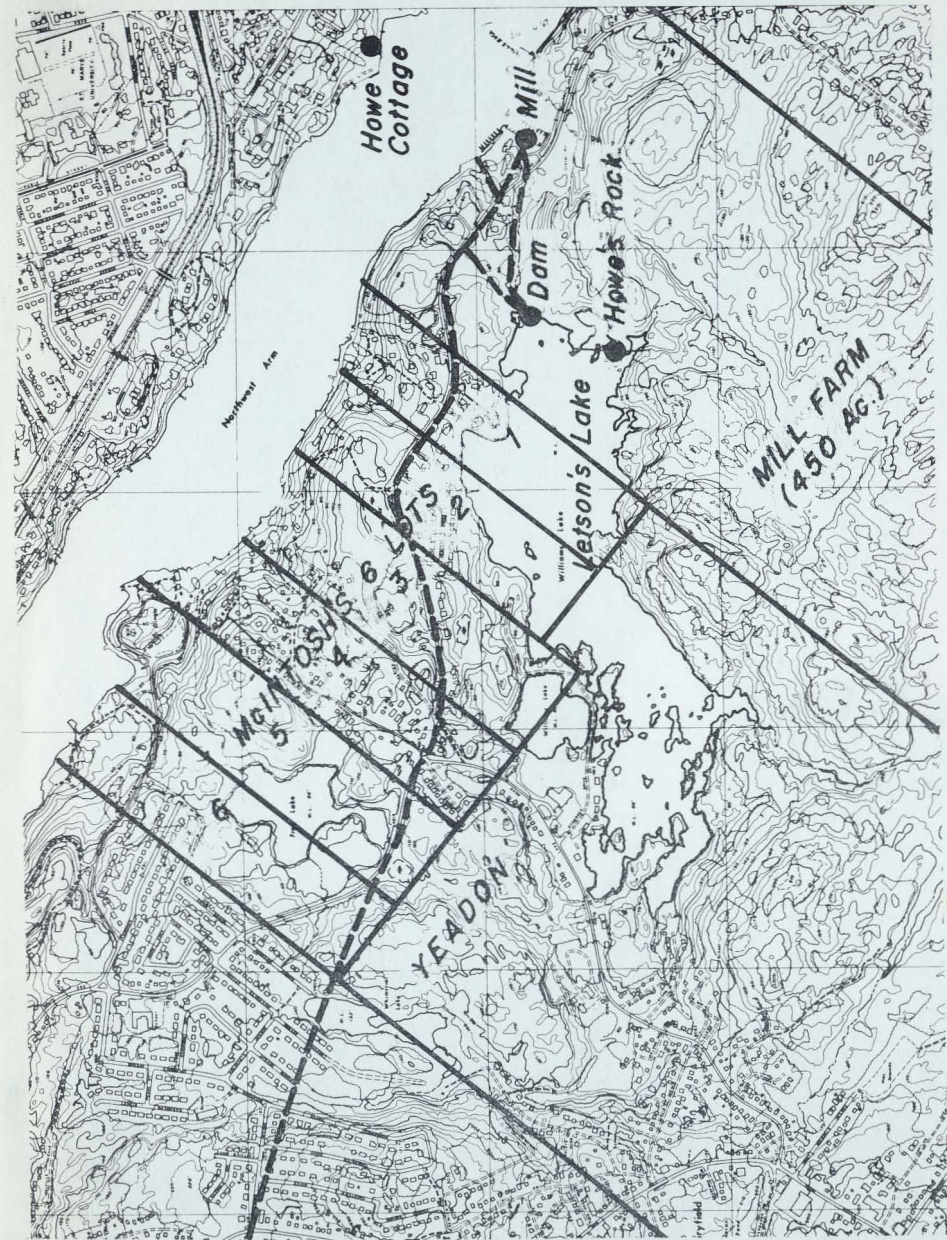
RICHARD DINGLE

The mill and Letson's Lake were next sold in 1822 to Richard Dingle, an Englishman who had been living and working in the United States. He visited Nova Scotia while recuperating from an illness and because of his extensive experience with milling both in England and the United States he was prevailed upon by friends in Halifax to purchase the

North West Arm mill and restore it to operation.³⁰ John Howe Senior, living on the opposite shore of the Arm, watched the new owner's efforts with interest and gave the following testimonial to the *Acadian Recorder* on his behalf:

*This may certify that the subscriber has had opportunity to observe the industry and perseverance of Mr. Richard Dingle since he took possession of the Mill on the North West Arm - the Race and Dam were at the time so decayed and neglected as to be nearly useless, and the Mill itself very much injured and put out of order. But that by a series of indefatigable exertions, all the most necessary repairs have been made, and the Mill rendered fit for the reception of grain in a far shorter time than the subscriber had deemed it possible.*³¹

Two months later a careless servant started a fire in the mill. The few people living nearby tried valiently to control the blaze but were unsuccessful. The mill and the 2,000 bushels of grain which it contained were reduced to ashes, and with them all Richard Dingle's hopes. Although a subscription was circulated in Halifax and the money raised enabled him to make a start at rebuilding,³² it was not enough to purchase all that he needed. Hoping for assistance from the Legislative Assembly he petitioned them in 1823 to grant him the money that was necessary to finish the reconstruction. His petition was never acted upon, and Dingle was forced to put the tannery up for sale, and leave the area. Although he stayed in the area for so short a time and so unhappily, it may be Richard Dingle's name that is perpetuated by one of Halifax's loveliest suburban parks which now lies near his property.



Dingle's petition to the Assembly had been presented by the Honourable William Lawson, member for Halifax County, and it was one of William Lawson's sons who next saw potential in the water power of the stream from Letson's Lake.

THE LAWSON FAMILY

William Lawson Junior leased the mill for a period of five years in 1831, but it was to remain in the Lawson family for the next 75 years. The grist mill was in working order when he took it over, but the years were taking their toll on the building because it is noted in the agreement that the wall of the mill on the water was out of plumb because of the weakness of the foundations, and that should the wall fall Lawson would not be held liable.

Several of the Lawson brothers and their uncle George P. Lawson were active in developing the industries that used the outlet stream for power. Robert and William Lawson were operating a nail works by 1832, and Robert later started a brewery. In 1838 Henry and George Lawson leased an acre of land on either side of the stream and invested \$2,000 to build a new grist mill. It had a 23 foot mill wheel and though this mill burned in 1910 it is still possible to see its foundations on the bank of the stream. "Sandwich Mills" was soon advertising barrels and bags of superfine flour for sale. There were only two other grist mills in the Halifax area at this time - Hosterman's at the head of the Arm, and one in Bedford. Henry Lawson was an astute business man and he accurately gauged the need in the growing community for a third mill, despite the failures of his predecessors. Later in the century he was to boast that it made a profit of \$100 a day in the busy season.

Robert was not so lucky. Fire struck once again in 1839, destroying his brewery and nail factory.³⁸ His mortgage holders threatened foreclosure and Henry had to come to his rescue in 1842, buying the whole property from him.³⁹ Robert stayed on to run the mill for his younger and more successful brother. At the Mill Farm he set up whale jawbones as gateposts,⁴⁰ perhaps as a reminder of happier days when he and William had owned the whaling vessel *Trusty* and sent her on profitable voyages to the South Atlantic.⁴¹

Henry Lawson became a prominent merchant in Halifax and a Director of the Union Marine Insurance Company. He spent his summers on the Arm in the cottage he called "Summer Rest" which later became the first home of the Saraguay Club. Rustic paths were laid out through the pine woods and along the shore, and benches placed where strollers could obtain the best view.

Nearly a hundred years later the ruins of the Mill Farm were known to be haunted. A man's footsteps were heard, and the slam of the doors as he entered the house, walked through it and out the front, but no-one was ever seen.⁴² Perhaps it was coincidence that the three men who had lived there had all had bitter and frustrating experiences. The footsteps could have belonged to Robert Letson, Richard Dingle or Robert Lawson, but by then these men had been forgotten.

THE JOLLIMORES AND THE BOUTILIERIS

At the beginning of the century George McIntosh had divided the land between the Arm and the lake into six large lots, and in 1816 he sold Lot #4 on part of the old Bridge grant to John

Howe Junior, Joseph Howe's half brother.⁴³ By mid-century John, Frederick and George Jollimore, fishermen and farmers from St. Margaret's Bay, had bought this lot and two adjoining 50 acre lots stretching back to the lake.⁴⁴ John and Jacob Boutilier, also from the St. Margaret's Bay area, bought portions of the Jollimore lots,⁴⁵ and the small houses were built along the shore and up the steep hillside which formed the nucleus of the Arm Village. Schooners from Tancook Island sailed up the Arm to supply the residents with sauerkraut and potatoes, which were supplemented from the small gardens of the settlement. The men would fish in the summers and obtain jobs at the mill or in some of the other enterprises that were connected with the lake at other times.⁴⁶

George Jollimore eventually lost the title to Lot #3 and it came into the hands of Henry C.D. Twining, prominent barrister and Clerk of the House of Assembly. He built Boscobel there as a summer residence. Later he was to give to his neighbour Bishop Binney, in trust, a portion of his land "for the Inhabitants of the western side of the North West Arm for the burial of their dead, forever."⁴⁷

THE YEADONS

Close by a modern parking lot on the slope of the wooded hill that overlooks Williams' Lake is the Yeadon family cemetery, now sadly neglected. Many of the stones are tumbled and broken, but it is still possible to make out the names of several members of this pioneering family. William and Elizabeth Yeadon paid forty pounds to George McIntosh's executors in 1846 and received in return 771 acres of the barren rocky land that

surrounded the western and southern parts of the lake.⁴⁸ They built a farmhouse on the Herring Cove Road, and joined the other farming families of Spryfield: the Kidstons, Sutherlands, Umlahs and Drysdals.

Farming can never have been a very rewarding occupation in this area. The census of 1827 shows 156 acres of land under cultivation which yielded only 30 bushels of wheat and 375 bushels of other grain. Almost 2,000 bushels of potatoes were harvested from the same land, which must have provided the staple diet of the farm families during the winter. What grain there was would have been carried along the narrow track to Lawson's Mill. Later in the century Lawson's Mill Road was built around the end of the lake, now referred to as Lawson's Lake, to improve the old track and join it to the Herring Cove Road at a more convenient point.

William Yeadon's descendents turned very sensibly to stoneworking, and three of his great-grandsons successfully operated granite quarries on their land near Long Lake at the turn of the century.⁴⁹

The original 771 acre farm was divided among the family's many branches and Yeadons still live on parts of the property today.

THE STONE ROAD

On the northern shore of the lake the Stone Road or Ice Road (both names are used in old land transfer documents) leads up from a little cove and curves towards the Arm. It was used in later years to bring ice from the lake to cottagers

but its name would indicate that it may also have been used to haul stone from the small quarries on the southern shore of the lake across the ice to Lawson's Mill Road or to the Arm for shipment. There were at least two quarries in the rocky barrens of the southern shore, and stone was brought out along the road that ran from the dam down Lawson's Mill Brook and also along a higher road which came out on the far side of the Mill Cove.⁵⁰ At least one family in the Arm Village, the Slaunwhites, became, by the end of the century, skilled stone-cutters, and it is possible that these quarries on Williams' Lake were worked in an informal way by the local people as they required stone. It is quite common to see large slabs of quartzite along the old roads with a scalloped edge of drill holes each carefully placed three inches from its neighbour. It was said of the Slaunwhites that they could "read" the fissures in the rock so accurately that when the stone hammer finally fell "the rocks would slice like cheese".⁵¹

THE HALIFAX ICE COMPANY

In 1863 the Halifax newspaper the *Sun* printed an editorial lamenting the failure of Nova Scotians to enter the ice trade and take advantage of the bountiful natural resource available to them, contrasting their lack of initiative with the enterprise of their New England neighbours.⁵²

Within two years The Halifax Ice Company had been formed, with G.H. DeWolfe of Windsor as Manager, to cut and store ice from Williams' Lake, on property leased for the purpose from Henry Lawson, who was nothing if not enterprising. The

Lawson wharf at the Mill Cove could already accommodate vessels of six to seven hundred tons and it only remained to construct an ice house nearby and a wooden trestle or race down which the ice could be sent from the lake.

In March of 1865 the *Sun* sent its reporter to Williams' Lake to see how the new business was progressing. He found the arrangements planned "in the most economic and judicious manner." At the lake end of the race men marked off the ice by horse-drawn marker, making a 2½ inch cut, then cross-marked it into 22 inch squares. The surface was ploughed and with an ice saw a large piece was cut away and floated down to the race where it was "barred off" into pieces of four and five blocks. These blocks were hauled up the five foot incline onto the race by rope and pulley drawn by a horse on the shore. The reporter continues:

The transfer of the blocks to the Race is very rapid, being at the rate of 400 to 500 per hour - and as many as 60 blocks are occasionally sent over the 1200 feet in one and a half or two minutes. In these 60 blocks there would be about six tons. The ice is sent into the house in a very easy manner. One man sits on the leading block and works a break, to prevent too great a velocity, and by which he can stop it altogether as soon as he runs his train of ice into the house, or on any part of the Race, if required. The Race conveys the ice into the centre of the building, where there is a sort of turntable,

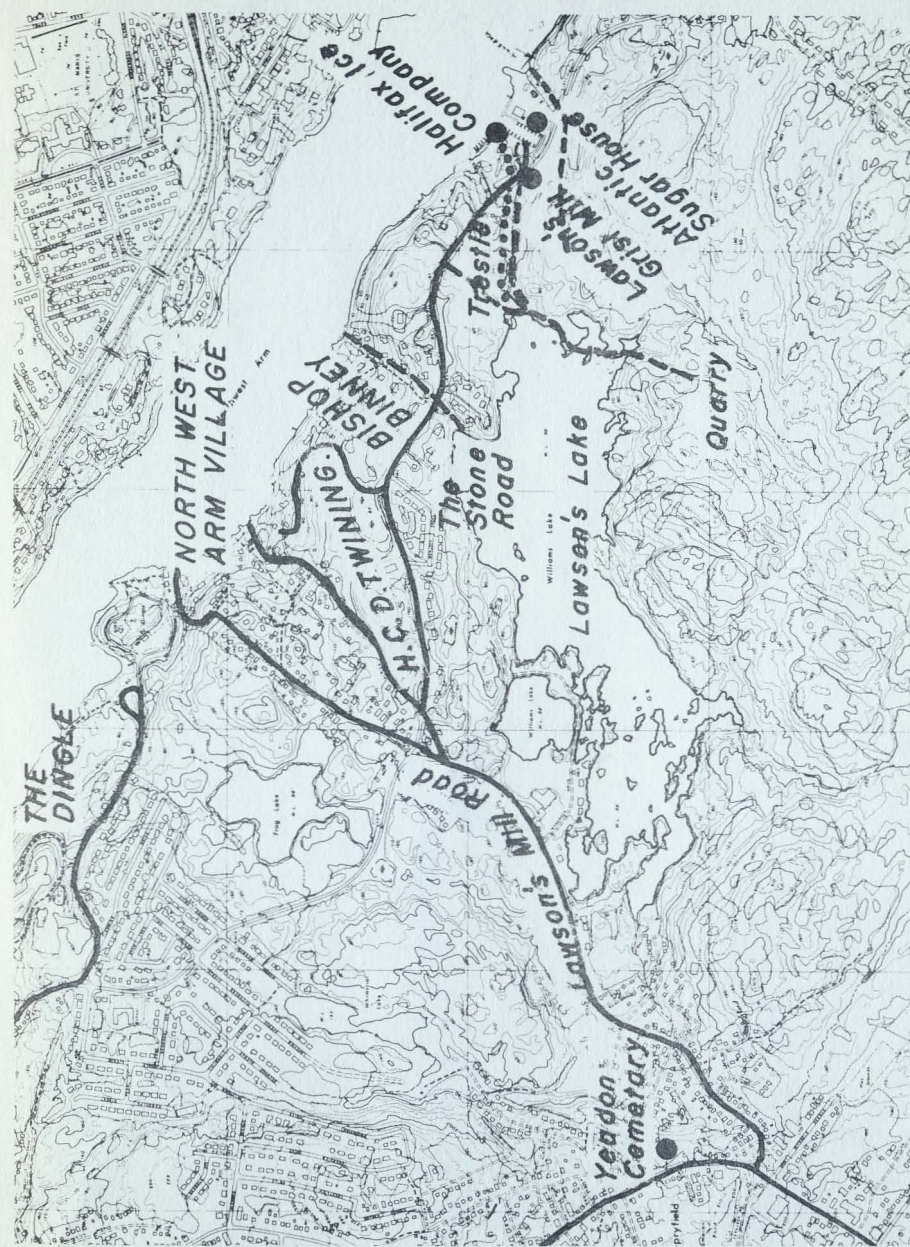
from which, on small rails, the blocks are sent to the points required. The store-house holds about 6,500 tons, and is now nearly filled, in most compact order, with tier upon tier of clear good ice.⁵³

No wonder the young men of the Arm Village enjoyed their winter work for the Ice Company! Riding the huge blocks down the trestle through the pine woods must have been an exhilarating experience.

Henry Lawson sold the property in 1881 to Miles and Chittick, who operated the business for ten years. Sam Chittick later became a well known Dartmouth ice merchant, with a large ice house on Lake Micmac.

THE PRISONER'S CAVE

Legend tells that about the middle of the century a prisoner escaped from the Penitentiary, then located near Howe's cottage across from the Mill Cove, and swam the Arm to freedom. He hid himself in a cave near the quarries until the search for him was abandoned when he was able to get away. During the manhunt he was fed by the people of the area, whose compassion had been aroused by the harsh treatment meted out at the prison. J.W. Regan in his *Sketches and Traditions of the Northwest Arm* says "the entrance to the cave is difficult to find in the maze of woods and boulders which surround it, unless one is familiar with the location", but it has been the joy of generations of children to search for it on summer days ever since.



THE ROAD TO YORK REDOUBT

In 1851 the *Nova Scotian* had carried an article applauding the fact that at last the long projected road around the North West Arm was to be "accomplished forthwith". Unfortunately they were a little premature, for three decades later there still was no road linking the settlements and farms along the western shore of the Arm with the city.⁵⁴

Arguments and difficulties arose all along the route which was to link Melville Island Prison with Lawson's Mill Road and continue by existing roads to York Redoubt. Henry Lawson was at daggers drawn with Sandford Fleming, by then the owner of the Dingle Estate, and letters flew back and forth between the irate participants and government officials.⁵⁵ The problem was the route that the new road would take through the Dingle. Was it to follow existing roads which Mr. Fleming had made for his own use close to the shore, as Lawson claimed he had been promised, or was it to pass to the south of the Dingle Lake and Mount Misery to join Lawson's Mill Road, leaving the privacy of the Dingle undisturbed? The *Nova Scotian* had trumpeted in 1851 "above all things let us hear no more about private rights in opposition to the public good. Such ideas are too old to be tolerated in this age of progress." But Fleming had his way, and month after weary month during the 1870's and 80's the convicts from the military prison at Melville Island were marched out to break the stone and build the new sections of the road just where Fleming wanted them to go.

The public never did get its carriage drive along the shore which was to be linked by ferry to Point Pleasant Park (opened in 1873), nor did the road pass "close to the poorer person's farms" as Lawson had wanted. But the

equipment and supplies for York Redoubt were now sent along the new road past the lake, and the labourious inland route from Herring Cove Road across the Pine Island Runs to Ferguson's Cove gradually fell into disuse.⁵⁶

THE ATLANTIC SUGAR HOUSE

In 1881 Henry Lawson was seventy years old and he had already begun to dispose of some of his property between Williams' Lake and the Arm. The Bishop of Nova Scotia, Hibbert Binney, was one of the first people to own part of the Lawson estate and others followed. Miles and Chittick bought the ice business in August and two months later the land at the Mill Cove was sold to the Atlantic Sugar House Company and the most intensive period of commercial exploitation of the lake began.⁵⁷

In the 1870's the West India trade was described as the life of Halifax and still capable of great expansion.⁵⁸ In 1878 nearly eight million pounds of raw sugar passed through Halifax to be refined, and in 1879 the amount had doubled. The Atlantic Sugar House was a very small concern compared with the Richmond Refinery which also opened in 1881 or the Halifax Sugar Refinery at Woodside of 1884,⁵⁹ but it managed to stay in business for some 20 years. A hydraulic ram was installed to provide water from the lake at greater pressure, and ships tied up at the refinery pier could unload raw sugar cane into the six-storey brick building.⁶⁰

Black coal smoke poured from the chimneys of the refinery as the 19th century drew to a

close in a bustle of industry and prosperity. Henry Lawson, the man responsible for initiating much of the enterprise connected with the lake, died in 1892, but already an interesting change of attitude towards the area was apparent. The *Morning Chronicle* had advertised the Williams' Lake Ice Establishment for sale the previous year;⁶¹ and after pointing out that the deed conveyed the exclusive privilege of cutting and shipping ice from the lake and that the property was particularly advantageous for the ice trade, the writer added that "it is, by reason of its charming surroundings, also well adapted for summer residences."

This was not to say that the mill property and the lake had never been used for pleasure and relaxation. The Lawsons and Bishop Binney as well as Henry Twining had summer residences there. Sculling as a competitive sport and a recreation had been associated with Lawson's mill, for the husky fishermen who made up the "Centennial Crew" and trained three times a day for the races at the Philadelphia Bicentennial had their headquarters there.⁶² Skating was popular in the 19th century and the mill road must often have led skaters up to the dam and the mile-long expanse of Williams' Lake glittering in the winter sun. But by and large the people of the 19th century had looked upon the lake for what they could extract from it of commercial value, while in the 20th century the lake has increasingly been used as a recreational and residential area.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE SEARCH FOR PEACE AND BEAUTY

Halifax, by 1900, had grown sufficiently large and industrial for people to appreciate the presence on the city's outskirts of clear lakes, and clean air where they could retire for four months each summer and yet be within reach of the city. The property between the Arm and the lake was split into smaller and smaller sections and the "cottagers" arrived.

GILPINVILLE AND THE ARM VILLAGE

A.E. Gilpin, son of the well-known Nova Scotian teacher and clergyman Edwin Gilpin, bought the Binney property and built a number of small cottages for his family and for rent to others.⁶³ The Saraguay Club bought the old Lawson property and later acquired the sugar refinery site and control of the water rights in the stream.⁶⁴

With the new railways providing easy communication between the cities of the continent, the tourist trade had been discovered. Delightful little picture books were produced extolling the virtues and beauties of Canada's growing cities and the public was shown photographs of the Northwest Arm, the captions of which described in lyrical tones the "enchanted inlets, reposeful little nooks and shady recesses which have such magic power to gladden the gaze and soothe the spirit".⁶⁵ Tourists flocked to hotels like the Birchdale on the eastern shore of the Arm and gaily joined in the canoeing and sailing races, the illuminations and spectacles that were held there, "where malaria is unknown and the nights are always cool".

More and more of the visitors and Halifax residents began to rent cottages for the summer on the opposite shore in Gilpinville or the Northwest Arm Village, where local people often had two houses - "one to live in and one to rent". F.B. McCurdy, owner of the *Halifax Chronicle* bought Chittick's cottage as a summer residence for his family and later rented it to Premier E.N. Rhodes for several summers. Max Aitkin, later Lord Beaverbrook, rented a cottage on the "three penny lot" (supposedly the rent that was paid) near the mill cove, and Marshall Saunders, Nova Scotian authoress whose story of *Beautiful Joe* had captivated children at the turn of the century, had a cottage near Williams' Lake. The Gilpinville and Arm Village cottagers used the lake for swimming when the sea was too cold, and some had auxiliary water supplies piped from the lake down the Ice Road.⁶⁶

The *Bluenose* of October 13, 1900 reported that:

Almost all the cottagers have come in from the Arm for the winter and I think they must feel a little bit sorry to get back to the coal smoke and grime of the city after four or five months residence in one of the most delightful country spots in the world...It seems only a year or two ago that the very thought of people spending a summer at so remote a place would have been scouted but a few went and each season has seen an increase in the number.

THE MEMORIAL TOWER

The remoteness of the area got Sir Sandford⁶⁷ Fleming into trouble again when he decided that he

wanted to give the Dingle estate to the city for a park providing they would erect an ornate Italianate tower to commemorate the meeting of the first legislative assembly in the British Empire in 1758. (The fact that Bermuda had had an elected assembly long before Nova Scotia was not apparently known to Sir Sandford or the local officials.) The committee appointed by the city to discuss the tower with Sir Sandford could not see it as a municipal concern at all and referred him to the province. The provincial committee that had arranged for the erection of a memorial plaque on the anniversary felt that they had already done all that their terms of reference required and could not engage in further negotiations for a memorial that was anticipated to cost in the neighbourhood of \$10,000 even if it did include a free park for the city.⁶⁸

The writers of letters to the newspapers had a field day. One pointed out that "the Lawson property with extensive frontage on Williams' Lake had sold for half of what Sir Sandford expected the taxpayers of the city to expend on his tower" and another writer thought that "the whole city was but a miniature park from one end to the other" and no further parkland could possibly be needed. In any case a far more suitable location for such a monument would be on Camp Hill, far from the "disagreeable sea atmosphere" and within reach of the ordinary person.⁶⁹ Sir Sandford, undaunted, calmly pursued the course he had decided upon, and after an amazing fund raising campaign of international proportions, conducted by the Halifax branch of the Canadian Club which raised \$23,600, the Memorial Tower was dedicated by the Governor General Earl Gray, in an impressive ceremony in 1912. The deeds to the park which had been held in trust for the ungrateful city by the Lieutenant Governor since 1908, until Sir Sandford's conditions

were fulfilled, were duly handed over.

Many of the cottagers, like Mr. Roy Hunter in Jollimore, soon tired of the wear and tear on the their household possessions as they were bumped and jolted over the potholes and granite outcroppings of the Purcell's Cove Road twice a year, and either winterized their cottages or built permanent homes on the western side of the Arm. The ferry, started by Sam Jollimore and continued later by the Boutiliers, provided access to the city at the foot of South Street for the residents of the western shore.

THE SERRICKS

In 1920 a young Newfoundland veteran of the First World War, Dan Serrick, brought his English war bride to live on Williams' Lake, the first person to establish a permanent home there. He bought the peninsula on which the Willowlake subdivision now stands from the Yeadon estate and extended and improved a small cabin which stood there. A carpenter by trade, he built row boats in the winter which he rented to the fishermen that flocked to Williams' Lake as soon as the mayflies hatched in the spring, and the water nearest the Williams' Lake Road, narrowly connected to the main lake, is still called Serrick's Pond. There was a pond in the hollow where Willowlake Terrace now stands, and the Serricks had a large and productive garden on the slope beyond.

The Serrick children went to the old Cunard school in Jollimore village where eight grades had once been taught in one room. Dogs panted and tea bottles steamed around the glowing central stove while work was assigned and recitations heard. In winter many children came down the Arm to school by ice boat and the teacher often had difficulty

reclaiming her charges after lunch. On at least one memorable day of bright sunshine she simply threw away the bell and joined her pupils on the ice.⁷¹

SECOND WORLD WAR BATTERY

During the Second World War the army constructed a mock gun emplacement on the height of land between Williams' Lake and Oceanview Drive to make the harbour defences appear more imposing to the enemy. On summer days the soldiers, tired of guarding their telephone pole guns and camouflaged plywood buildings, would slip down to the lake for a swim and a chat with the local girls.⁷²

THE FIRST SUBDIVISIONS

In 1950 and 1953 the first subdivisions were opened on the Williams' Lake side of the Purcells' Cove Road. Alarmed by reports that a hot dog concession was about to be opened for the many swimmers who used the lake in the summer, Boulderwood Properties was formed by residents of the old Gilpinville area and by buying up the land concerned they were able to control its disposition in a way more suitable to what was rapidly becoming a high quality residential area.⁷³ The residents of Halls Road and Wenlock Grove petitioned the County Planning Board in 1955 to impose restrictions on lot size and the location of septic tanks in a proposed subdivision to protect the lake and the many people who used it from the effects of sewage pollution. A second objective stated was the protection of "the very substantial investments" that the people who had so far built near or on the lake, had made.⁷⁴ These two motivations for environmental action are often

closely linked from this time on. There is no doubt that the people who stand to gain most from restrictions on further development around the lake are those who are already resident upon it. But they are also the people most closely aware of the changes in the lake from year to year and concerned enough to alert municipal and provincial authorities to the potentially harmful effects of increasing development on the lake that is a recreational resource for all.

In 1964 lots were offered for sale on Wyndrock Drive and across a causeway that the developer had created between the bay known as Martin's Pond and the main lake. These lots were the first to be serviced with piped water and sewers which removed the danger of septic tank infiltration of the lake water. Although Wyndrock Drive and the Willowlake subdivision of 1968 quickly built up at the western end of the lake no developer was able to produce a financially feasible plan for the lots across the causeway and the scarred hillside where the bulldozers ripped through forest and rock to create roads, piling earth into artificial hills, still awaits its suburban split levels and manicured lawns.

THE WILLIAMS' LAKE CONSERVATION COMPANY

As building continued along the lakeshore residents of the area became concerned about the falling water levels, sewage pollution and infilling by developers at the western end of the lake. Commander Anthony Law, architect Charles Fowler and others decided to rebuild Henry Lawson's old dam and raise the water levels again, but they shortly found themselves in trouble with the Nova Scotia Water Resources Commission. It was intimated that they could have been jailed for such

meddling with provincial waters! But they were also told that if an incorporated body existed with which provincial authorities could deal, continued maintenance of the dam would be considered permissible.⁷⁵ The Williams' Lake Conservation Company was organized from among local residents in 1968 and continues to hold the water rights to the lake and to care for the dam which is located on land belonging to the McCurdy estate. In addition to ensuring that water levels remain constant, the Company has arranged for regular monitoring of water quality and environmental studies, protested infilling of the lake to create larger waterfront lots, and it maintains close contact with municipal and provincial authorities. Neighbourhood contact is kept up by means of a newsletter.

Of crucial concern to the Company is the continuing infiltration of raw sewage into the lake during storms. Because of the lack of storm sewers, heavy rains cause the flooding of sanitary sewers which overflow and drain through the roadside ditches into Serrick's Pond. Pollution counts in the pond regularly exceed safe limits for swimming each summer, though Williams' Lake generally is still considered one of the cleanest in the city.

THE FUTURE OF THE LAKE

In 1971 Paul Dean, a wildlife biologist, prepared a report for the Metropolitan Area Planning Committee on the intrinsic values of the natural environment in the Halifax-Dartmouth area. He cited the large number of freshwater lakes in the metropolitan area as invaluable for recreational purposes, as a refuge for wildlife and as a fishery resource. Deploring the

common practice of allowing building to completely encircle a lake, cutting off public access, he recommended that a 150 foot green belt be created around all lakes and that certain unique areas be acquired by the city to form a series of metropolitan parks. Dean cited the grove of mature white pine at the east end of the lake as a "category two" area, that is, of limited abundance in the Halifax-Dartmouth area and of high aesthetic value. Should the Northwest Arm Drive continue across the barrens from the Old Sambro Road as the survey crews have already staked it out, it will pass directly through this grove, destroying the dam swimming area, and creating erosion and increased siltation in the lake.

At the present time plans for development along the northern shore of the lake continue, with the City Recreation Department concentrating recreational facilities on the pond behind Cunard Junior High School. The southern shore is part of a holding zone which cannot be developed until the Spryfield detailed Area Plan has been completed, and planning guidelines established for the whole area.

Two alternatives exist for Williams' Lake as we approach the end of the 20th century. Private development can continue along the shores of the lake until it cuts off public access to traditional fishing, swimming and skating areas, and the continuing infiltration of sewage, road salt and garden fertilizers will accelerate the natural process of eutrophication, destroying the lake's potential for recreation and aesthetic benefit; or an alert and informed public will see to it that the city integrates this lake and others outside the park system into a planning mix of residential and

recreational land.

The 200 years of recorded history on Williams' Lake have never produced problems as critical as the ones we must face in the next 20 years. When someone climbs Mount Misery in the next century will he see the lake with its essential usefulness and beauty undiminished and appreciated? We hold the answer in our hands.

FOOTNOTES

1. Information from Mrs. Melville Coppel.
2. Hetherington, J.L. *Some Notes on the Northwest Arm*. Public Archives of Nova Scotia.
3. Akins, Thomas B. *History of Halifax City*. Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections, Halifax: 1895, p. 209.
4. PANS Collections, Vol. 417, p. 122.
5. PANS Collections, Vol 417, p. 138, 139. Original grants, Provincial Crown Lands Record Office.
6. Original grant, Provincial Crown Lands Record Office.
7. PANS *Nova Scotia MLA's 1758-1958*.
8. Information in Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 12, p. 192: Thomas Bridge to Gregory Olive, 1773. Although the mention of a house and outbuildings is often used as a stock phrase and does not necessarily mean their presence, this grant was described two years before as "all wilderness land" and because of the terms of the grant, it is likely that he made some improvements.
9. Buchanan, John M. "Spryfield's History" , *The Suburban Mirror*, June 1968.
10. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 18, p. 37.
11. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 18, p. 38.

12. PANS map collection. Blaskowitz map, 1784.
13. Buchanan, *op. cit.*
14. George McIntosh and his wife Louisa had four daughters, all of whom are mentioned in his will. One, also called Louisa, married Matthew Richardson of Studley and she and her husband were painted by the Halifax society artist Robert Field.
15. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 20, p. 269; Vol. 29, p. 357; Vol. 30, p. 82.
16. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 34, p. 284.
17. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 35, p. 620.
18. *The Nova Scotia Royal Gazette*, April 28, 1807.
19. PANS map collection. Toler map, 1808.
20. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 30, p. 530.
21. PANS Letson family papers.
22. *The Acadian Recorder*, February 22, 1817. Description of the mill offered for lease after Robert Letson's death.
23. "Lettson's Mills" by J.E. Woolford. The original is in the Morse Collection at Acadia University, Wolfville.
24. *The Acadian Recorder*, February 1, 1823. Description of the tannery offered for sale by Richard Dingle.

25. Regan, J.W. *Sketches and Traditions of the Northwest Arm*. Halifax: 1908, p. 64. Confirmed by contemporary enquiry.
26. Fergusson, C. Bruce. *Joseph Howe of Nova Scotia*. Lancelot Press, 1973, p. 16.
27. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 41, p. 368, 369.
28. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 47, p. 133.
29. PANS Letson family papers.
30. PANS RG 5 Series P, Vol. 120. Petition of Richard Dingle.
31. *The Acadian Recorder*, November 9, 1822.
32. Journals of the House of Assembly, 1823.
33. PANS original lease of the Mills, 1831.
34. PANS House of Assembly Papers, Trade and Commerce Petitions, February 10, 1832.
35. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 70, p. 510. House of Assembly Papers, Trade and Commerce Petitions, February 6, 1839.
36. *The Nova Scotian*, November 15, 1838.
37. Information from Mrs. Myrtle Burton.
38. *The Halifax Times*, March 26, 1839.
39. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 72, p. 493.
40. A plan of Henry Lawson's property "Summer Rest" shows the whale jawbones. Courtesy of Mr. M. Power, Crown Lands Record Office.

41. PANS Vol. 310, document 113. December 3, 1829.
42. Information from Mr. Pearson McCurdy.
43. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 43, p. 76.
44. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 51, p. 7 (1826); Vol. 81, p. 325, 328 (1845).
45. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 67, p. 21 (1839); Vol. 178, p. 248 (refers to deed in 1849).
46. Information from Mrs. Myrtle Burton. Mrs. Burton is descended from both founding families of Jollimore, being the daughter of James Boutilier and his wife Lucy Jollimore.
47. Deed and information in the possession of Mrs. Myrtle Burton.
48. Halifax County Deeds, Vol. 87, p. 540.
49. Parks, William A. *Report on the Building and Ornamental Stones of Canada*. Ottawa: 1914. Courtesy of Mr. Stephen Archibald, Nova Scotia Museum.
50. Information from Mr. Pearson McCurdy and Mr. G.R. Draper.
51. Information from Mr. George Martin.
52. *The Sun and Advertiser*, March 2, 1863.
53. *The Sun and Advertiser*, March 10, 1865.
54. *The Nova Scotian*, June, 1851 (three references.)
55. PANS Correspondence of Sandford Fleming.

56. The road left the Herring Cove Road at Princeton Avenue. It is shown on a map in the PANS of 1886.
57. Regan, *op. cit.* p. 85.
58. White, G.A. *Halifax and Its Business*, Halifax: 1876, p. 161.
59. Blakeley, Phyllis. *Glimpses of Halifax 1867-1900* Halifax: 1949, p. 39.
60. Photograph and information from Mr. Pearson McCurdy.
61. *The Morning Chronicle*, July 23, 1891.
62. Regan, *op. cit.* p. 169.
63. Information from Mrs. Philip Rowlings.
64. Regan, *op. cit.* p. 86.
65. Howard and Keitsche, *Halifax, Nova Scotia and Its Attractions*. c. 1903. Prior to 1900 the spelling North West Arm was used almost exclusively. In the 20th century writers have tended to use the spelling Northwest Arm.
66. Information in this paragraph from Mrs. Myrtle Burton, Mrs. Philip Rowlings, and Mr. Pearson McCurdy.
67. Sandford Fleming was knighted in 1897
68. Chisholm, J.A. *The Halifax Memorial Tower*, Halifax: 1913.
69. *The Halifax Herald*, November 5 and 20, 1909.

70. Information from Mrs. Melville Coppel and Mrs. George Boutilier.
71. Information from Mr. George Martin.
72. Information from Mr. G.R. Draper.
73. Information from Mrs. Kenneth Hall.
74. Information from Mr. David Howitt.
75. Information from Commander Anthony Law.