

Ogden Point – A Work in Progress

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By Josie Bannerman

A century ago local business people saw an opportunity to increase trade from deep-sea vessels using the Panama Canal. Their enthusiasm led to the creation of the port of Victoria at Ogden Point. Since then, having local control of our harbour has been seen as a necessity, providing the flexibility required for survival and growth.

John Briant, General Manager at Western Stevedoring's Ogden Point Cruise Terminal, has seen this necessity first hand. "I can certainly comment on the ups and downs of Victoria as a port and in general as it relates to other small ports in BC and indeed along the entire West coast," he said.

"Over the past 22 years, I've worked in most of the ports on the West coast. During this time, many of these ports have dwindled and at least 15 have died, as coastal forest product industries collapsed. Along with the ports, the communities around them have suffered dramatically as well."

Briant reflects that Victoria was once one of these ports thriving on lumber, plywood, grain exports and a fish packing plant. "But because of its strategic location and the vision of a few industry leaders, it has been able to adapt and reinvent itself as the industries it once relied on so heavily faded into history," he said.

Over the last 25 years the cruise ship industry at Ogden Point has steadily increased from just a few calls each year to a record 240 calls anticipated in 2017. And as it grew, business leaders once again led the charge for local control.

Stewart Johnston, John Sanderson and Don Prittie were very involved. All three were members of the Victoria Esquimalt Harbour Society (VEHS) or one of its predecessors. "Local control of the



Ogden Point at night - Now. Over the last 25 years cruise ship calls at Ogden Point have steadily increased from just a few each year to a record 240 calls anticipated in 2017.

Photo courtesy of Western Stevedoring

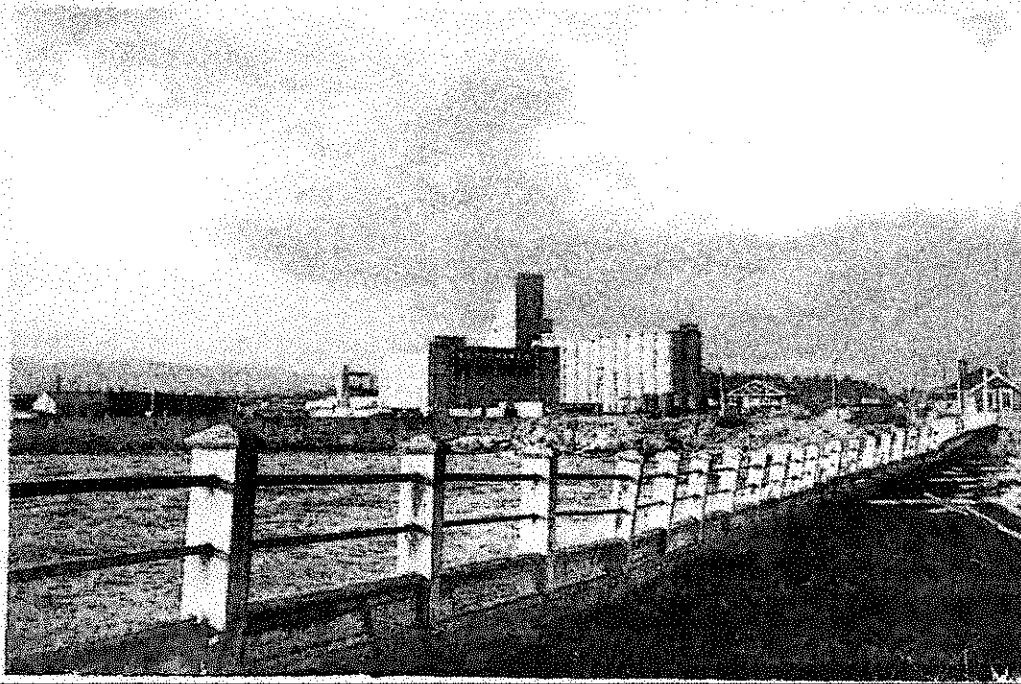
harbour didn't exist in the early 1990's," Sanderson said. But by 1995, when Transport Canada began exploring the possibility of transferring ownership of ports to local stakeholder control, support was keen and the concept of a "working harbour" paramount.

"Tourism Victoria, the Chamber of Commerce and the Victoria Esquimalt Harbour Society held initial meetings with the City of Victoria and the fed-

eral government," said Stewart Johnston. "Between 1996 and 2002 this group expanded to include the Songhees Nation, Esquimalt Nation, the Provincial Capital Commission, and the township of Esquimalt."

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*Photo Courtesy of Western Stevedoring
This photo of Ogden Point in the early days shows the Panama Pacific Grain Terminal built about 1925,
and the BC Packers fish processing and cold storage plant built around 1928.*

In 2002, as an outcome of these deliberations, the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority (GVHA) was formed, and the federal government divested four parcels of harbour land to its control – Ogden Point, Fisherman’s Wharf and marinas at Causeway/Ship Point, and Wharf Street. Stewart Johnston became chair of the new GVHA, and John Sanderson, one of the original board members. Don Prittie also joined the GVHA board in the early years and became chair after Johnston left.

“Local control of the harbour has allowed Ogden Point to fund and maintain itself”, said John Briant. “This has encouraged other new non-cruise businesses to develop – like the Cable ship that is based at Ogden Point, and the yacht transport ships that call in year round. Because of its attractions, beautiful downtown and wonderful terminal, Victoria has become a port that cruise lines want to call at.”

Don Prittie concurs. “Transfer of assets to the GVHA has been a very good thing for Victoria and for tourism,” he said. “All of the facilities are cleaner, safer, and function better; and the GVHA remains committed to developing a working harbour. But there is still work to be done,” he said. “It would be nice someday to have a fully divested harbour in local hands.”