

Section XII: The Building of the Esquimalt Naval Drydock

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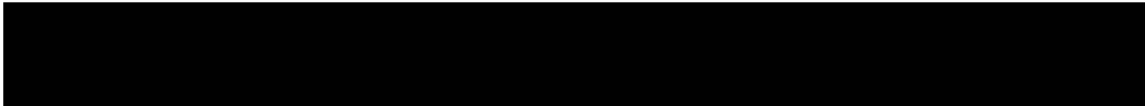
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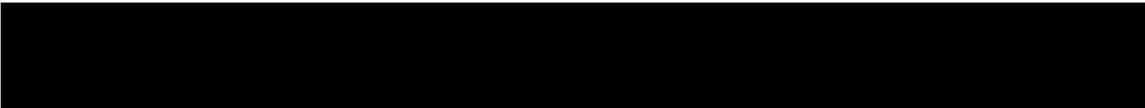
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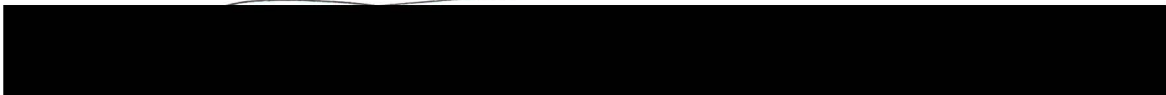
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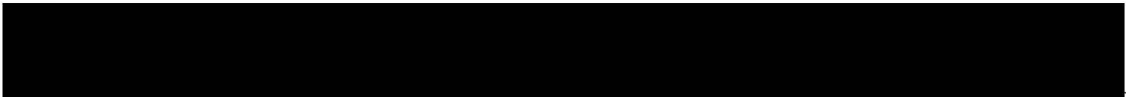
ABSTRACT

Early in the history of the colony of “Vancouver’s Island,” the idea of building a drydock to facilitate the repair of the vessels which carried all cargo and passengers to and from Victoria and neighbouring settlements arose. The development of Esquimalt as headquarters of the Royal Navy’s Pacific Station provided further impetus to the idea, and the project enjoyed widespread public support. Nevertheless, twenty-six years elapsed between the first public call for the dock’s construction in 1861 and its opening in 1887. This thesis examines the motivations for the construction of the first Esquimalt drydock and the reasons for the delay in its building, and evaluates its benefits.


By drawing on archival records from the different governments involved, the Royal Navy and some of the individual participants, as well as from the newspapers of the time and published sources, this thesis sheds light upon an important piece of early British Columbian and Canadian history. This is a story previously overshadowed by the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and deserving of its place in our historical consciousness. The impetus for the graving dock’s construction lay in both commercial and defensive considerations, while the causes of the delay revolved mainly around who would pay for it and how. Within the constraints of the information available, this study documents the importance and beneficial effect of the Esquimalt graving dock both to those who proposed it and built it, and to those who have continued to use it for nearly 114 years.




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Introduction

Few Canadians, let alone British Columbians, have ever heard of what is now called the Esquimalt Naval Drydock. Even fewer know its full story and its importance in the history of British Columbia, Canada, and the British Empire. It is rarely mentioned in historical texts despite its role in the development of British Columbia and its inclusion in the Terms of Union with the Dominion of Canada. In fact, due to its position deep inside what is now Her Majesty's Canadian Dockyard at Esquimalt, few Canadians outside of the military have ever even *seen* it.

The aim of this thesis is to change that – to bring an important piece of Canadian and British Columbian history out into public view. The story of the drydock, told from the time it was first suggested publicly in 1861 until it was finally opened with great fanfare in 1887, represents a span of 26 years. It includes both the colonial and provincial periods of B.C. history, the building of the Pacific railway, and the founding of the city of Vancouver on Burrard Inlet. It spans as well the U.S. Civil War and Imperial tensions with Russia, which until 1867 was the sovereign power in Alaska. It is a story which attempts to answer a wide variety of important questions, and which contains its fair share of political intrigue, individual triumph and human tragedy.

This thesis will attempt to answer what must be considered the most important historical questions about the drydock: Why did both the people of British Columbia and the Royal Navy favour the construction of a graving dock? Why did they want it located in Esquimalt? Why did it take so long to build, considering that almost everyone concerned wholly supported it? And finally, were the expected benefits of the

project in fact realized? Questions concerning what could fairly be called the ‘legal aftermath’ that resulted from the cancellation of contracts and other such issues could in themselves fill an entire volume, and will therefore be left to consideration in a future work.

It would at this point be useful to explain what exactly a drydock or graving dock is. The *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* defines a drydock as:

A watertight basin, with one end, which can be closed and sealed with a caisson, open to the sea, in which ships can be docked for repair, examination, or cleaning of the underwater body. When a ship is to enter a drydock, the dock is flooded, the caisson withdrawn, and the ship floated in and held in position so that her keel and docking keels are immediately above the line of blocks prearranged on the floor of the dock. The caisson is replaced and the water in the dock pumped out, the ship’s keel settling on the blocks as the water level falls to support the weight of her hull. After her repair or cleaning, the dock is flooded up, lifting her off the blocks, the caisson withdrawn, and she is floated out.¹

It should be noted here that the terms ‘drydock’ and ‘graving dock’ are synonymous and will be used interchangeably. The latter name originated from the old practice of ‘graving’ a ship’s hull by burning the marine growth off and covering it with tar – a task which required the ship to either be drydocked or beached at low water.² The earliest known purpose-built stone graving dock was constructed for the Royal Navy at Portsmouth Royal Dockyard, England, in 1495 during the reign of King Henry VII. The dockyard itself had been founded by King John in 1212, and during the intervening period vessels in need of repair were either beached and ‘careened,’ that is rolled from

¹ Peter Kemp, ed.. “Dry-dock,” in *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 212.

² Kemp, “Dry-dock,” p. 351.

side to side on a soft bottom, or placed inside a temporary dock that was made of mud and clay and bailed out by hand.³

Since that time, as the size and complexity of vessels increased, permanent facilities for the docking and repair of ships became an absolute necessity. The oldest surviving permanent drydock in the world is No.2 Dock at Portsmouth, now the home of the preserved HMS *Victory*. Its dimensions are not much more than those of *Victory* herself, which is 226 feet long and 51 feet in beam, and displacing 3,500 tons.⁴ Both the first and second Esquimalt docks were, at the time of their construction, advertised as being among “the largest in the world,” and capable of accommodating ships of any size then in use.⁵ The first Esquimalt dock was 450 feet long as completed, but could be extended to 481 feet by moving the caisson to the ‘outer’ position. The ‘inner’ position was filled-in during the Second World War, so the dock is now permanently 481 feet long and 65 feet wide. By way of comparison, the largest drydock in the world today is located at the Okpo Shipyard of Daewoo Heavy Industries at Koje Island, South Korea. It measures 1,739 feet long by 430 feet wide, with 48 feet above the sill, and is capable of holding a ship displacing 1,000,000 deadweight tons.⁶

The sources which will be used in this thesis will consist of published primary and secondary works, as well as archival material and newspapers. While, as will become apparent, this material has proven sufficient to construct a factual account of the first drydock’s history, it is not without problems. Specifically, it has occasionally

³ “Docks.” Article located in Graving Dock file, CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum Archives, p. 1; and “Regeneration through Heritage – Portsmouth Dockyard” website – <http://www.bitc.org.uk/rth/portsdock.html>.

⁴ “Docks,” p. 1; and A. B. C. Whipple, *Fighting Sail* (Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1978), p. 17.

⁵ Les Butcher, “The Drydocks of Esquimalt,” in Maureen Duffus, ed., *Beyond the Blue Bridge: Stories From Esquimalt*. (Esquimalt: Silver Threads Writers Group, 1990), pp. 47-50.

been necessary to rely on single or contradictory sources for some information. This is particularly true of the newspapers. Of those published in Victoria, both the *Daily British Colonist* and the *Daily Standard* were published throughout the period under consideration. Unfortunately, only a full run of the *Colonist* has survived. With regard to the newspapers published in New Westminster, copies of the *Mainland Guardian*, the *British Columbian* and the *Dominion Pacific Herald* have survived, although not always in complete runs. Additionally, substantial volumes of the *Nanaimo Free Press* still exist.

The limited historiography of the Esquimalt Naval Drydock consists mainly of short stories compiled by local groups or historians. As far as can be determined, no professional historian has explored the drydock's story. Those professionals who have discussed the drydock in any way have generally done so in a cursory manner, and as part of a larger historical study. Nonetheless, their work will be briefly discussed here.

The first and also the most thorough discussion yet published about the drydock is the six page narrative account in Major Frederick V. Longstaff's excellent work: *Esquimalt Naval Base: A History of Its Works and Its Defences*. He discussed the campaign, both within the Naval and civilian communities, to secure the dock's construction, as well as the political and engineering processes involved in the work. He is the only author to point out some of the dock's limitations, but concluded that overall its construction was necessary and beneficial.⁷

⁶ "China Shipbuilding" website – <http://www.shipchina.com/english/CO/index1/shipbuilding.htm>; and "Kojé City" website – <http://city.koje.kyongnam.kr/english/travel/sub01/eastern/list06.htm>.

⁷ Major F. V. Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base: A History of Its Works and Its Defences*. (Victoria: Victoria Book & Stationery Company, 1941), pp. 24-26 and 37-39.

Leigh Burpee Robinson's *Esquimalt: Place of Shoaling Water*, published in 1947, was the first of the two local histories to discuss the drydock. As might be expected of a broad and purely local history, she only briefly discussed the drydock. She did, however, go into some detail regarding the events preceding its construction, including the proposed sites for it and the fact that it was sufficiently important to be included in British Columbia's Terms of Union with Canada. She concluded by listing the names and social pedigrees of the individuals who participated in the official opening of the drydock in 1887.⁸

Gilbert Norman Tucker, in his landmark but incomplete two-volume work, *The Naval Service of Canada, Its Official History*, merely notes in one paragraph that the dock was opened in 1887, was greatly over-budget when completed, and that vessels of the Royal Navy were given privileged access to the dock during its first fifteen years of operation as recompense for the Admiralty's monetary contribution to its construction. Beyond this, as must be expected of a work focusing on a service not founded until 1910, he limited his discussion to the facilities completed after the turn of the century.⁹

Perhaps the best-known historian to have discussed the drydock in his work is Barry Gough, Professor of History at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, and a native of Victoria. In *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810-1914*, Dr. Gough briefly discussed the Royal Navy's motivation for supporting the construction of a drydock in the North Pacific, and some of the factors

⁸ L. B. Robinson, *Esquimalt: Place of Shoaling Water*. (Victoria: Quality Press, 1947), pp. 119-120.

⁹ Gilbert Norman Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada, Its Official History: Volume I – Origins and Early Years*. (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1952), p. 80.

which delayed its construction. In one paragraph he pointed out some of the many benefits which accrued both to the Navy and to British Columbia after its completion.¹⁰

Parks Canada historian Ronald Lovatt, in his manuscript *History of the Defence of Victoria and Esquimalt, 1846-1893*, which chronicles the history of Fort Rodd Hill and the other fortifications of Southern Vancouver Island, mentions the drydock, *per se*, only once. In the chapter dealing with the development of Esquimalt as a Naval Station, he noted that by 1871 the harbour was a major base of the Pacific Squadron, and that its only major deficiency was the lack of a drydock. “Until this was completed,” he wrote, “Royal Navy vessels requiring hull repairs had to use the facilities at San Francisco.”¹¹

The next publication to tell the drydock’s story was an in-house military publication by two men who worked in close proximity to the dock every day. Eugene Witt, an electrician at the Ship Repair Unit, and Lieutenant (Navy) Jim Thomas, an engineering officer, co-authored *Ship Repair Adventure: HMC Dockyard Esquimalt*, in 1985. The three pages dealing with the drydock are filled with interesting facts and figures about the dock and its construction. This work is noteworthy as one of the few secondary sources which explicitly mentions the “anti-Canadian” feeling which arose in the United States after the Civil War as a factor in the dock’s construction. Unfortunately, the book’s lack of notes seriously restricts its value.¹²

A local Esquimalt historian, Les Butcher, wrote a four-page chapter, “The Drydocks of Esquimalt,” in *Beyond the Blue Bridge: Stories from Esquimalt*, published

¹⁰ Barry M. Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810-1914*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1971), pp. 224-227.

¹¹ Ronald Lovatt, *A History of the Defence of Victoria and Esquimalt, 1846-1893*. (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1980), p. 25.

in 1990. Like those of most of its predecessors, Butcher's account is completely narrative. It offers little information not found in the other accounts, and perpetuates the mistaken assertion found in several of the previous works, that the first drydock was built in Lang Cove rather than Thetis Cove.¹³

G. W. Taylor, in *Shipyards of British Columbia: The Principal Companies*, noted the drydock many times in his book, mostly commenting on its usefulness to B.C.'s ship repairing firms in their early years, when none of them possessed such a facility of their own. He also briefly outlined some of the motives behind the dock's construction, and the Dominion government's eventual takeover. Although brief, Taylor's book presented useful information relating to the dock.¹⁴

The final work which must be included in this historiography is another in-house military publication is Thomas Henderson's *A Construction Engineering History of Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt, 1855-1992*. Surprisingly, considering that Henderson is the branch historian of the Royal Canadian Engineers, the book contains little regarding the drydock. This is most likely because its design and construction were the responsibility of a civilian firm, rather than the R.C.E.. Nonetheless, Henderson provides yet another short narrative detailing some of the events preceding the dock's construction, including the transfer of responsibility for the works from the provincial to the Dominion government in 1884.¹⁵

¹² Eugene Witt and Jim Thomas, *Ship Repair Adventure: HMC Dockyard Esquimalt*. (Esquimalt: CFB Esquimalt, 1985), pp. 8-11.

¹³ Butcher, "The Drydocks of Esquimalt," pp. 47-50.

¹⁴ G. W. Taylor, *Shipyards of British Columbia: The Principal Companies*. (Victoria: Morriss Publishing, 1986), pp. 23 and 54-56.

¹⁵ Thomas Henderson, *A Construction Engineering History of Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt, 1855-1992*. (Esquimalt: Royal Canadian Engineers, 1992), pp. 9-11.

Such is the historiography of the Esquimalt Naval Drydock to date. Clearly, there is a need to thoroughly examine the history of this important piece of Canadiana. Through its inclusion in the Terms of Union between British Columbia and Canada, it was accorded much the same status in terms of its importance as the Canadian Pacific Railway. Both projects played an important role in Canada's development, both were surrounded with controversy, and delays in both threatened the national unity which they had been meant to secure. This thesis will seek to demonstrate the Esquimalt drydock's importance, and contribute significantly to its understanding in British Columbian and Canadian history.

Chapter I

Origins: The Founding of the Esquimalt Naval Station

Despite being constructed, owned and operated by the civil rather than the military power, the building of the first drydock was inexorably tied to Esquimalt's role as a naval station. Its development as such was, in turn, connected to the competition between great powers for control of the territory and its resources. The first European vessel known to have entered the harbour was the Spanish sloop *Princessa Real*, under Lieutenant Manuel Quimper, on 19 June 1790, during the Nootka Sound Controversy in which Spain claimed sovereignty over the entire western coast of North America.¹⁶ The three Nootka Sound Conventions, in which Spain effectively ceded her claims to sovereignty over all of the territory north of California, ended this dispute. Quimper was followed, possibly, by Captain George Vancouver of the Royal Navy, who circumnavigated and conducted hydrographic surveys of what was to become known as "Vancouver's Island," between 1792 and 1794. However, as his orders instructed him to make only a running survey of the mainland, there is still some debate over where exactly he explored on the island.¹⁷

What is known for certain is that British interest in the area was not great until the "Oregon Crisis" of the early 1840s. Since 1818, the territory comprising what is now the American states of Oregon and Washington had been under joint occupation by both Britain and the United States. This arrangement continued without significant conflict until the late 1830s, when the American Senate introduced a bill "for the

¹⁶ Henderson, A Construction Engineering History, p. 4.

¹⁷ Longstaff, Esquimalt Naval Base, p. 11.

military occupation of Oregon from 42° North latitude to 54°40' North latitude, the ending of Anglo-American condominium and the promotion of settlement.” This action by the United States led to almost a decade of tension and the perceived threat of war, culminating in the 1844 Democratic Party election slogan “54-40 or fight.” The two countries eventually agreed, under the terms of the 1846 Washington Treaty, to extend the border along the 49th Parallel right to the Strait of Georgia, and grant full sovereignty over Vancouver Island to Great Britain. This did not end their territorial conflict, however, and the threat of war between them became a major guiding force behind British Columbia’s early development.

Anticipating that the Americans would eventually acquire title to the Oregon country, the Hudson’s Bay Company had made plans to move its Pacific headquarters away from Fort Vancouver on the North bank of the Columbia River. In 1842-43, the Company dispatched James Douglas to establish a trading post on Vancouver Island. The site he selected was at Fort Victoria, several kilometres east of Esquimalt, due to its proximity to reasonably good arable land. Douglas visited the area of Esquimalt harbour in the same year, and signed treaties with the local natives to allow for the establishment of three farms in the area. In 1846 Lieutenant James Wood of HM Brig *Pandora*, assisted by Robert Inskip and several midshipmen from HM Frigate *Fisgard*, extensively surveyed the harbour. The first British man-of-war to enter Esquimalt harbour, HM Frigate *Constance*, anchored in the cove now bearing her name on 25 July 1848.¹⁸

¹⁸ The material in the preceding two paragraphs comes from Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast*, *passim*.

During the following few years several British warships took temporary shelter in the harbour, and in 1851 the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Station, Rear-Admiral Fairfax Moresby, wrote to the Secretary of the Admiralty from his flagship, the frigate HMS *Portland*, then lying at Esquimalt, urging “the Government to reserve for ‘Her Majesty, Her Heirs and Successors’ this Harbour of Esquimalt and its shores; the only place where a Naval Establishment can be formed, and admirably adapted for all its operations.”¹⁹ In 1852 HMS *Thetis*, a frigate of 36 guns, refitted there, and her crew constructed the first ‘Naval’ buildings, albeit without the Admiralty’s approval, on Thetis Island. These included a carpenter’s shop and a blacksmith’s forge.²⁰ Three months after *Thetis* departed, the paddle-wheel sloop HMS *Virago* visited the site and found it to be, “[a]ll in all, quite a convenient dockyard,” despite it being an unofficial one.²¹

This period represents the birth of Esquimalt as a naval station. The headquarters and main victualling ports of the Pacific Station remained, for the time being, in South American waters. However, as Ronald Lovatt has pointed out, British sea-captains recognized early on the inherent advantages of moving the station’s headquarters to Esquimalt. It was in British territory, near the seat of a British colonial government. The climate was healthy, the harbour itself suitably large and sheltered, and almost all of the stores and victuals the navy required were available locally at a reasonable price.²²

¹⁹ RAdm Moresby to Secretary of the Admiralty, 3 July 1851, Pacific Station Records, National Archives of Canada and BC Archives.

²⁰ Lovatt, A History of the Defence of Victoria and Esquimalt, p.24, and Gough, The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast, pp. 184 and 260.

²¹ G. P. V. Akrigg and Helen B. Akrigg, H.M.S. *Virago* in the Pacific, 1851 – 1855. (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1992), pp. 104-105.

²² Lovatt, A History of the Defence of Victoria and Esquimalt, p. 23.

Indeed, Rear-Admiral Moresby had asked the Admiralty to make an agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company for the provision of supplies, as he considered it "impossible to victual the smaller vessels at Valparaiso for any extended service, if required at Vancouver to protect the interests of the Company."²³ A copy of this letter was also passed, most likely by James Douglas, to the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company in London, J. H. Pelly. Pelly certainly made no objections to the establishment of a naval station, and asked only that "the Company should have early notice of the intentions of Government, as otherwise difficulties may occur from previous appropriation."²⁴ Although no explicit reply from the Admiralty is extant in the records of the Pacific Station, subsequent events make it clear that Moresby's request was rejected.

Since 1843, the supporting infrastructure for the Royal Navy in the Eastern Pacific had consisted of a series of store ships based in Chilean harbours. As Frederick Longstaff noted, the three vessels used for this purpose at Valparaiso, Coquimbo and Callao were a poor substitute for a regular shore establishment. They were cramped at the best of times, and the Chilean climate was not conducive to the long-term preservation of stores. Furthermore, when the officers and men went ashore in these ports, they were immediately confronted by a foreign language and currency.²⁵

The Crimean War of 1854-6 against Russia had further demonstrated the need for a permanent base at Esquimalt. In September 1854, a combined Anglo-French squadron made an assault on the Russian port of Petropavlovsk, on the Kamchatka

²³ RAdm Moresby to Secretary of the Admiralty, 3 July 1851, Pacific Station Records.

²⁴ Governor of Hudson's Bay Company to Colonial Secretary, 7 November 1851, Douglas Correspondence, BC Archives.

²⁵ Longstaff, Esquimalt Naval Base, p. 19.

Peninsula. This attack failed, and some of the damaged vessels returned to Esquimalt to effect repairs and land their wounded.²⁶ Unfortunately, no facilities were available to assist them since nothing more had been done to improve the ‘unofficial’ naval facilities in the harbour since Moresby had made his recommendation to the Admiralty.²⁷ The following year, Rear-Admiral Bruce, Moresby’s successor, asked Governor Douglas to “provide a building ... that may service as a temporary Hospital for the sick and wounded: the want of which was seriously felt last year.”²⁸ Governor Douglas proceeded to have constructed, near Duntze Head, what became known at the ‘Crimean Huts.’ These three structures, despite their ‘temporary’ and ‘unofficial’ nature, cost the Admiralty £1,000 and were used, in a variety of roles, until the last was finally torn down in 1939.²⁹

In 1855 James Douglas, who was then both Governor of the colony and Chief Factor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, restated much of Moresby’s earlier argument when he told the Colonial Secretary in London that supplies shipped from England to the Pacific Station should be taken directly to Esquimalt instead of being landed at Valparaiso. This, he argued, would relieve warships of the necessity to either “abandon their distant stations” or arrange to be re-supplied by hired transports. He proposed that a storehouse be erected at Esquimalt for the express purpose of keeping provisions available for Her Majesty’s ships in the Pacific, and even offered colonial money in support of the endeavour.³⁰ Clearly, the colonial government saw that the establishment of permanent naval facilities at Esquimalt was in its best interests from

²⁶ W. Kaye Lamb, “Esquimalt Naval Base” in *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*. (October 1942), p. 282n.

²⁷ Lovatt, *A History of the Defence of Victoria and Esquimalt*, p. 23.

²⁸ RAdm Bruce to Governor Douglas, 14 February 1855, Pacific Station Records.

both a defensive and economic point of view. With warships based permanently near the colony, there would be little fear of attack, and frequently calling supply ships would improve communications with England and take colonial exports back to the mother country in their otherwise empty holds.

That the colonial government and the senior naval officers at Esquimalt agreed on this issue is demonstrated by a report from Rear-Admiral Bruce dated 28 November 1856. The Admiralty had requested this report as a direct result of Douglas' letter to the Colonial Secretary the previous year.³¹ In it, Bruce echoed the arguments of both his predecessor and Governor Douglas, saying that:

It would be an advantage to the Service, if a Provision Depot were established at Vancouver [Island] for the ships employed in the North Pacific. At present a Ship stationed at that Island, for the protection of the Colony, has to sail over a space of seven thousand miles to get to her Depot: so that in point of fact, when a vessel arrives at the distant part of the Station, it is time to think of returning again for supplies. By having a Depot for provisions and stores at Vancouver [Island], Ships employed at the Sandwich Islands and San Francisco, could repair thither for supplies, and it would thus tend to lessen materially, the number of very long voyages made on this station and the wear and tear of sails &^{ea} consequent thereon; and Ships would be able to remain longer, at ports where their presence may be required.³²

However, like that of Moresby, Bruce's request was denied by their Lordships at the Admiralty, who decided that arrangements for victualling should be made either at San Francisco or the Sandwich Islands themselves.³³

At this point there is a gap in the available records, but clearly the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty had a change of heart. In 1857 they ordered, if not yet the building of a permanent establishment on Vancouver's Island, then at the very least

²⁹ Witt and Thomas, *Ship Repair Adventure*, p. 5.

³⁰ Governor Douglas to Colonial Secretary, 13 September 1855, Douglas Correspondence.

³¹ Colonial Secretary to Governor Douglas, 24 December 1855, Douglas Correspondence.

³² RAdm Bruce to Secretary of the Admiralty, 28 November 1856, Pacific Station Records.

³³ Secretary of the Admiralty to RAdm Bruce, 12 January 1857, Pacific Station Records.

the transfer one or more of the store ships to that location. By all available accounts, this was viewed as a very positive development by the officers and men of the Pacific Station, who engaged in “great rejoicings” when news of it reached them.³⁴

Finally, in January 1859, nearly nine years after Moresby first recommended it, seventeen acres of land at Duntze Head was reserved for the use of the Admiralty.³⁵ Their Lordships were not yet certain of their decision, however, and two months later sought the opinion of Rear-Admiral Baynes, Bruce’s successor. Baynes replied that Esquimalt would have many advantages over Valparaiso as the site of the Pacific Station’s headquarters because of its climate and the availability of space to store provisions. He also reported that, except for fresh beef, supplies were available as cheaply at Esquimalt as at Valparaiso. Moreover, he noted that moving the headquarters to Vancouver Island would put money into the colonial economy and greatly benefit its development.³⁶ Even so, there was a further, unexplained, delay of almost six years before the base at Esquimalt was ‘officially’ established with the passing of an order-in-council in London on 29 June 1865.³⁷

In their praise for the possibilities inherent in the colony, the Commanders-in-Chief were not alone. Visiting English author William Hazlitt, writing in 1858, noted that Vancouver Island’s “fisheries are most valuable, its timber the finest in the world for marine purposes,” and that its abundance of coal was “well fitted for the generation of steam.” None other than Sir Samuel Cunard, he said, was interested in establishing a

³⁴ Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base*, p. 19.

³⁵ Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Volume I*, p. 58; and Witt and Thomas, *Ship Repair Adventure*, p. 6.

³⁶ Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Volume I*, p. 58.

³⁷ Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base*, p. 137.

line of steamships to serve the colony.³⁸ Hazlitt also quoted Colonel W. C. Grant, the Island's first colonist, and the Honourable Charles Fitzwilliam, M.P., who visited Esquimalt in 1852 and called its harbour "the finest I ever saw."³⁹ The Right Honourable Edward Ellice, M.P., one the leading proprietors of the Hudson's Bay Company, said of the colony:

It is a kind of England attached to the continent of North America. I think it should not only be on the ordinary system of English colonies, but that it should be the principal station of your naval force in the Pacific. It is an island in which there is every kind of timber fit for naval purposes. It is the only good harbour (and it is an excellent harbour) to the northward of San Francisco, as far north as Sitka, the Russian settlement. You have in Vancouver Island the best harbour, fine timber in every situation, and coal enough for your whole navy; the climate is wholesome, very much like that of England; the coast abounds with fish of every description: in short, there is every advantage in the island of Vancouver to make it one of the first colonies and best settlements of England.⁴⁰

And if this were not enough to ensure the good will of the Imperial government towards the development of the colony and the naval station, even more praise is delivered in the 1862 work of Dr. Alexander Rattray, Royal Navy, a medical doctor stationed at Esquimalt in the period between the reservation of lands and the official establishment of the harbour as an Imperial Naval Station. In *Vancouver Island and British Columbia: Where They Are; What They Are; and What They May Become*, Dr. Rattray wrote:

Whatever future success may attend these colonies, there cannot be a question as to their vast importance to Great Britain in a political and strategic point of view; more especially Vancouver Island, possessing a favourable geographic position in the Pacific, and a convenient naval harbour – that of Esquimalt. Until recently the English navy had really no harbour of their own along the whole of the lengthy western coast of America in which to coal, refit,

³⁸ William Carew Hazlitt, British Columbia and Vancouver Island. (London: G. Routledge & Company, 1858), p. 113.

³⁹ Hazlitt, British Columbia and Vancouver Island, pp. 150-151 and 200.

⁴⁰ Hazlitt, British Columbia and Vancouver Island, pp. 200-201.

provision, or concentrate, if necessary, during war. ... Esquimalt is now the principal naval rendezvous on the American side of the Pacific; and, from its comparative proximity to China, it appears by no means improbable that it will also become a depot for the still larger and more important China fleet, where ships may refit, coal, &c., more conveniently and more easily than in China, which possesses no regular naval depot. This harbour may thus become, at a future day, the principal naval depot of the entire Pacific.⁴¹

Rattray further pointed out that Esquimalt's usefulness as a base had already been shown during the Crimean War, during hostilities with China, during treaty negotiations with Japan, and in the 'San Juan difficulties.'⁴² The discovery of gold on the Fraser River in 1858 added even more impetus for the Admiralty's subsequent reservation of the Esquimalt lands, as responsibility for policing the gold regions fell to the Royal Navy, the only British force readily available during the early period.⁴³

This impetus was somewhat tempered by questions over whether or not Esquimalt was really the best place on the coast for the establishment of the naval station. Aside from Esquimalt, the locations which were discussed were Victoria proper, Nanaimo, and Burrard Inlet. This is important because the location of the naval station would later be central in the arguments over the location of the drydock. Some of the debate over the naval station's location was captured in the works of the time. William Hazlitt, writing of Nanaimo, said that: "There is good anchorage all over the harbour, which is commodious, and sheltered from all winds; there is a rise and fall of fifteen feet at spring tides, and of about twelve feet at ordinary times; it is an excellent place to lay up and repair vessels: the bottom is in general soft mud."⁴⁴ The problems with establishing a naval station at Nanaimo, although not discussed explicitly in the

⁴¹ Alexander Rattray, M.D., R.N., Vancouver Island and British Columbia: Where They Are; What They Are; and What They May Become. (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1862), pp. 144-145.

⁴² Rattray, Vancouver Island and British Columbia, p. 145.

⁴³ Gough, The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast, pp. 131-149.

sources, are fairly apparent. Although the harbour is large and there is abundant coal and fresh water nearby, it was relatively distant from any seat of colonial government – Esquimalt is only four miles from Victoria, and Burrard Inlet is less than ten miles from New Westminster. Also, while Burrard Inlet was near the Fraser River gold fields and Esquimalt commanded the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Nanaimo was isolated to the point that it is questionable whether anyone there would even know if an enemy fleet were nearby. In any event, Nanaimo does not seem to have been very seriously considered.

Of Victoria, Hazlitt wrote that it “is situated on a small but well sheltered harbour; the entrance is intricate, and the harbour cannot be said to be suitable for large vessels.”⁴⁵ Again, while neither Hazlitt nor his contemporaries mentioned them, Victoria’s disadvantages are fairly obvious. First and foremost is that the harbour is very narrow as well as shallow, and to this day large vessels are unable to enter the harbour, but must instead dock behind an artificial breakwater at Ogden Point. Secondly, as Victoria was already established as the commercial capital of the colony, most of the suitable land was already in use for private purposes. As Matthew MacFie pointed out in 1865, it is not “desirable that the naval depot and the commercial centre should be included in the same city.”⁴⁶

Hazlitt praised Esquimalt as “a safe and commodious harbour for vessels of all sizes, and combining the advantage of sufficient shelter, with that of an open entrance,

⁴⁴ Hazlitt, *British Columbia and Vancouver Island*, p. 167.

⁴⁵ Hazlitt, *British Columbia and Vancouver Island*, p. 170.

⁴⁶ Matthew MacFie, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia: Their History, Resources, and Prospects*. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1865), p. 68.

into which a line-of-battle ship might beat without difficulty.”⁴⁷ Yet it was not without deficiencies, as James Douglas pointed out. After his first visit there in 1842, he wrote:

Esquimalt is one of the best harbours on the coast, being perfectly safe and of easy access; but in other respects it possesses no attraction. Its appearance is strikingly unprepossessing, the outline of the country exhibiting a confused assemblage of rock and wood. ... The view is closed by a range of low mountains, which traverse the island at a distance of about 12 miles. The shores of the harbour are rugged and precipitous, and I do not see one level spot clear of trees of sufficient extent to build a large fort upon. ... Another serious objection to the place is the scarcity of fresh water.⁴⁸

MacFie concluded “that Esquimalt [was] admirably suited for a naval station, and for the accommodation of vessels of large tonnage, but [did] not present conditions favourable for the erection of a great city.”⁴⁹

The disadvantages of Burrard Inlet were much less obvious. What must be remembered, however, is that the C.P.R. was not yet even a dream, and what is now the city of Vancouver was a large forest. To quote from an editorial published in the *Times* of London, dated 25 June 1860:

If all that is required for a naval station be so much water for so many ships to float and anchor it, and so many acres of land for docks in a wilderness, these essentials are obtainable in Burrard Inlet. ... But as the naval station placed in that locality involves the navigation of a portion of the Straits of Fuca [sic], of the whole of Canal de Haro (under the guns of the American batteries if San Juan be given up), together with the crossing of the Gulf of Georgia, often a tempestuous sea, as well as the other waters which intervene between Burrard Inlet and Esquimalt and the ocean, all of which navigation would be an addition to a voyage long enough already, and which would be avoided by leaving the squadron to rendezvous at Esquimalt where the ships now lie, most competent judges prefer Esquimalt for the headquarters of the squadron. Esquimalt is near the ocean, easily accessible by day and night, now that a lighthouse is placed at its entrance. ... Besides these conveniences, it possesses great facilities for fortifications over ever other harbour in the Pacific Ocean. It could be made impregnable at less cost than any other harbour in these seas could be rendered partially secure; and it is well situated

⁴⁷ Hazlitt, British Columbia and Vancouver Island, p. 170.

⁴⁸ MacFie, Vancouver Island and British Columbia, p. 68.

⁴⁹ MacFie, Vancouver Island and British Columbia, p. 68.

for supplying ships to defend the entrance into the Straits of Fuca – a measure to the accomplishment of which ‘Port San Juan,’ situated on Vancouver Island, near the entrance, possesses important facilities in having a harbour three miles long, and capable anchoring a fleet in safety. From this port one or two ships could blockade the entrance and make Fuca Straits a British lake, while Esquimalt is close at hand to afford supplies and all necessary assistance. ... At Victoria, the men-of-war get all they want. ... Vancouver Island will be the point of attack, if an attack is made on one of these colonies by any hostile power, as it must be secured to make the Continent tenable if taken. So that if Burrard Inlet were made the naval station, it would involve this anomaly – that while the head-quarters were over there, the ships would always be stationed here. The naval station must be at Esquimalt.⁵⁰

And so it was. However, even after the ‘official’ reservation of lands for the Admiralty’s use in 1859 development advanced at a very slow pace. Indeed, the stone naval magazine constructed on Cole Island in 1860 was the only substantial addition before the early 1870s, although quite a few wooden buildings were erected for various purposes.⁵¹ Despite this slow development, the station was in practice, if not in actual fact, the headquarters of the Royal Navy in the Eastern Pacific from then until the founding of the Royal Canadian Navy in 1910, when that service took over the dockyard and its facilities.

The basic story of the birth of Esquimalt as a naval station has now been established. The next question to be explored is how exactly that birth relates to the construction of the first drydock. As was alluded to above, the question later arose as to whether or not the drydock should be co-located with the naval station, and again arguments for and against Nanaimo and Burrard Inlet were publicly aired.

While Fort Victoria had been the Hudson’s Bay Company’s regional headquarters since 1843, and became the capital of the “Colony of Vancouver’s Island” in 1849, its commercial importance, and that of nearby Esquimalt, were not fully

⁵⁰ MacFie, Vancouver Island and British Columbia, pp. 127-128.

realized until the beginning of the Fraser River Gold Rush in 1858. Suddenly, the sleepy little town of less than 1,000 people became the jumping off point for the thousands of fortune-seekers heading for the gold fields. What must be remembered is that during this period, the only feasible way to travel from Europe to the west coast of North America was by ship, either around Cape Horn or via the shortcut of the railway crossing the isthmus of Panama. Alexander Mackenzie and Simon Fraser had shown that one could cross North America by land and river, but overland travel was not a realistic option for passengers and trade goods until the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885. Thus, everything and everyone that came to or left the colony, or the gold fields, traveled by sea.

In the 1850s the largest port on the Pacific coast of North America was San Francisco, which had become wealthy as a result of the California Gold Rush. The merchants of Victoria were very aware of this. After gold was discovered in British Columbia, most of them must have seen the fabulous opportunity before them. On 8 May 1858 Governor Douglas wrote to London that: “The merchants and other business classes of Victoria are rejoicing in the advent of so large a body of people in the colony, and are strongly in favour of making this port a stopping point between San Francisco and the gold mines, converting the latter, as it were, into a feeder and dependency of this colony.” Victoria would thereby become the centre of trade for the gold districts, which in turn would result in “an increase in the wealth and population of the colony.”⁵²

A successful port needed facilities capable of repairing and refitting damaged ships. Ship-owners would send their ships to carry cargo wherever there was demand,

⁵¹ Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base*, pp. 23-24.

⁵² Hazlitt, *British Columbia and Vancouver Island*, p.133.

but the rates for both shipping and insurance were much higher in places like Vancouver Island, where there were numerous hazards to navigation and very few aids such as lighthouses or buoys. What is more, shippers and insurers knew well that the closest facility capable of proper ship repair was at Mare Island near San Francisco, over 1,000 miles to the south.

Many ships, both naval and merchant, came to grief on the coast of Vancouver Island. Lieutenant Richard Mayne of the Royal Navy wrote in 1862 that if a floating drydock had been provided at Esquimalt in 1858, it would by then have “more than paid for its construction” by servicing five damaged British men-of-war and least a dozen merchant vessels. Furthermore, such a dock would have had the important side-benefit of alleviating the Station’s reliance upon the American drydock at Mare Island.⁵³

The stories of four of the naval vessels alluded to can still be found in the historical record: The screw-frigate HMS *Termagant*, 31, ran aground in Active Pass in July 1860 and was subsequently sent to San Francisco for repairs; the surveying vessel HMS *Hecate*, 6, ran aground in the Autumn of 1861; and both the surveying vessel HMS *Plumper* and the screw-corvette HMS *Charybdis*, 21, ran aground in 1860-61.⁵⁴ The cases of the *Termagant* and the *Hecate* are particularly interesting, as their repairs did not go wholly as planned.

The *Termagant* was being placed in the floating drydock at Mare Island, but as her stern came to rest on one of the buoyant sections, it began to capsize. This caused the ship to fall off of the wooden blocks which were supporting her, and she came to

⁵³ Lieutenant Richard Mayne, R.N., Four Years in British Columbia. (London: Murray’s, 1862), pp. 24-25.

rest at an angle with her masts against the pump-houses of the dock. Had she been further out of the water when the accident occurred, she would most likely have destroyed the pump-houses, and caused the entire dock to capsize and sink, taking her with it. As it was, the cost of repairs to both dock and ship were nearly \$200,000, and had to be paid by the Admiralty.⁵⁵

The story of the *Hecate*, while not so costly in monetary terms, could have been much more so politically. It seems that the ship ran aground, ironically enough, while conducting hydrographic surveys, and after preliminary repairs at Esquimalt, was escorted to Mare Island by another of Her Majesty's ships. Unfortunately, while she was in the dock, Captain Charles Wilkes, USN, commanding the screw sloop USS *San Jacinto*, took it upon himself to stop and board the British mail-packet *Trent*, which was carrying two Confederate diplomats to Europe.⁵⁶ The resulting controversy very nearly resulted in war between the United States and the British Empire, in which case the *Hecate* would have been trapped and captured without a fight by the Americans.⁵⁷

It is perhaps for this reason that when HMS *Charybdis* was damaged by grounding, she was repaired at Esquimalt by building a cofferdam around her rather than by sending her to San Francisco like the others.⁵⁸ Either way, the need for some kind of facility capable of repairing ships at Vancouver's Island was becoming more apparent.

⁵⁴ Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base*, pp. 24, 32n.

⁵⁵ Mayne, *Four Years in British Columbia*, pp.159-160 and Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast*, p. 224.

⁵⁶ E. B. Potter, ed., *Sea Power: A Naval History, 2nd Edition*. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981), p. 126.

⁵⁷ Mayne, *Four Years in British Columbia*, p.160 and Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast*, p. 193.

⁵⁸ Robinson, *Esquimalt: Place of Shoaling Water*, p. 119.

Indeed, in addition to the floating dock at Mare Island being potentially dangerous both in material terms and as a result of its location in a foreign country, it was too small to meet all of the Royal Navy's needs. It was capable of lifting ships of up to 2,000 tons, and although another, permanent stone dock was already in the planning stages, even *it* would not be able to accommodate ships such as the station's flagship, HMS *Zealous*, which displaced 3,700 tons. In fact, the only dock in the entire Pacific capable of holding such a large ship was at Melbourne, on the south coast of Australia, nearly 10,000 miles away.⁵⁹

On 7 September 1861, the *Victoria Daily British Colonist* made what is probably the first public pronouncement of support for the building of a drydock at Esquimalt. After the incidents involving the *Plumper*, *Termagant* and *Hecate*, the *Colonist* pointed out that the money expended both on the repairs to these ships themselves and the damage done to the Mare Island dock would have gone a long way to construct a similar dock at Esquimalt. In light of the increasing importance of British commerce in the Pacific, the *Colonist* argued that so long as the Royal Navy depended upon an American facility for the repair and refit of its ships, it would effectively be at the United States' mercy in that theatre in time of war.⁶⁰ It concluded that:

Hitherto the Imperial Government has done but little for us colonially. The whole of our public burdens have been borne by our own Treasury. Consequently it is not too much to expect that something more substantial will be done for us from a national point of view. The promise of a Regiment of the Line to be billeted in the Sanatorium, is evidence that we are not wholly forgotten. But with a garrison, we also want a dockyard with a sectional dock or patent slip, where Her Majesty's ships can be repaired in cases of accident, instead of spending vast sums of money in a foreign country, which would afford employment to a large number of persons here.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast*, p. 225.

⁶⁰ "Naval Dockyard at Esquimalt." *Victoria Daily British Colonist*, 7 September 1861, p. 1.

⁶¹ "Naval Dockyard at Esquimalt." *Colonist*, 7 September 1861, p. 1.

Henceforth, the building of a drydock became the goal of many of the colony's prominent citizens. Governors, Admirals, newspaper editors and ordinary citizens alike publicly called for it until the dock finally opened, twenty-six years later.

Indeed, at this time the question of dock accommodation was an issue throughout the Empire – even in Great Britain itself. The 1862 British *Hansard* contains much debate on the issue, with the consensus being that dry dock construction in British Territories had not kept up with the increases in the size and weight of warships. Indeed, an investigation had found that while England possessed thirty-two dry docks in 1862, *twenty-two* of them were *less* than 280-feet in length, and therefore unable to dock the Royal Navy's newest line-of-battle ships. Worse still, France had roughly *twice* the dockage-space of England. Speaking of the colonies, the members noted that most stations did not have a dock large enough to hold their flagships. The result was a proposal for increased dock construction, including the building of new facilities at Bombay, Sydney, Hong Kong, Malta and Halifax.⁶² So while Esquimalt was not named specifically, a proposal to build a dock there could not have been looked at in other than a favourable light under such circumstances.

Response to such entreaties was slow, however, and three weeks later the *Colonist* complained that it “could not comprehend” why no action had yet been taken on the matter.⁶³ Then realizing that it would take a lot longer than three weeks for an answer to arrive from London, the *Colonist* patiently waited. After a year had passed without news of the drydock from London, the *Colonist* again expressed its hope that

⁶² Great Britain – House of Commons. Report of Debates (Hansard) - 1862. (London: HMSO, 1862), pp. 467-492.

⁶³ “Dock Yard at Esquimalt,” Colonist, 1 November 1861, p. 1.

“the Government will soon ... set about constructing a work so much needed by the navy and the shipowner.”⁶⁴

It seems that at this point that the consensus in Victoria held that the dock would be run by the Admiralty and the cost borne by the Imperial government. In March 1863 the *Colonist*, while not abandoning its support for the dock, changed its focus and began discussing it not as an Admiralty programme funded by the Imperial government, but as a private venture to serve the increasing number of merchant ships which were frequenting local waters. Describing a newly-built facility at Amoy, China, it wrote:

Instance after instance has repeatedly occurred in which men-of-war and merchantmen have sustained damage on this coast; and as the tonnage of this Island and Puget Sound increases, we may anticipate a proportionate increase in marine accidents, making a dry dock indispensable. There being no dock nearer than San Francisco, a dry dock here becomes a matter of first importance to our merchants; and if regarded solely with a view to serve our local shipping, it deserves early attention. But if we connect the tonnage frequenting Puget Sound with such an enterprise, we at once raise to view the increased importance of our commercial situation. The disbursements of vessels when docked are always heavy, and the funds thus expended would prove of immense benefit, not only in providing employment for shipwrights and kindred callings; but indirectly to the trade and realty of this port. From the apparent disinclination of the Admiralty to construct a dock at Esquimalt within any reasonable period, we apprehend that our merchants will have to grapple with the Dock question themselves.⁶⁵

Clearly, the lack of any action on the part of the Admiralty to construct a dock had convinced the merchants of Victoria that any dock built would have to be privately-owned, and at least partially financed with private money. The over-riding question would come to be the *source* of that private financing, as the Victoria merchants certainly could not do it by themselves.

⁶⁴ “A ‘Monitor’ and a Dock for Vancouver Island,” *Colonist*, 13 November 1862, p.3.

⁶⁵ “Dry Dock at Amoy,” *Colonist*, 16 March 1863, p. 1.

Indeed, in August 1864 a “company of English capitalists” proposed to construct a very large graving dock at Constance Cove, Esquimalt.⁶⁶ The following month the *Colonist* announced that the work was to be commenced “immediately.”⁶⁷ What exactly it meant by “immediately” is unclear, as no work was begun and nothing more was written of the project until January 1866, when it was announced that information had arrived from England indicating that “the proposed Graving Docks at Esquimalt are positively to be proceeded with forthwith,” and that the un-named company had \$600,000 in capital available, which was being supplemented by a further \$100,000 from the Imperial government under the terms of the Colonial Docks Act.⁶⁸ This Act, which had become law in 1865, provided a grant of £20,000 to any company which undertook to build a suitably large graving dock in a British colony. In return, Her Majesty’s ships were to be given preferential access to the dock when needed.⁶⁹

For almost a year there was again no news. Then, in December 1866, the *Colonist* reported, without explanation, that the project had been delayed, “owing to the disinclination of people having money to invest in enterprises of the kind.”⁷⁰ It did not elaborate on why no-one seemed interested in investing in the scheme, but clearly this surprised the merchants and shippers of Victoria. The *Colonist* used the occasion to repeat its call for a drydock, writing that:

The necessity for a Dry Dock at this port was never more apparent than at this time. There are no less than three vessels in port awaiting repairs that will necessitate their going into dock. As we have no accommodation of the kind here, the vessels can only be hove down temporarily and patched up, after which they must sail to San Francisco to complete the job. The Nicholas

⁶⁶ “Graving Dock at Esquimalt,” *Colonist*, 8 August 1864, p. 3.

⁶⁷ “Esquimalt Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 9 September 1864, p. 3.

⁶⁸ “Docks at Esquimalt,” *Colonist*, 22 January 1866, p. 3.

⁶⁹ “Colonial Docks Act.” in *Acts of the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, 28-29 Victoria*. (London: HMSO, 1866), Chapter 106.

⁷⁰ “The Esquimalt Dry Dock,” *Colonist*, 20 December 1866, p.3.

Biddle, alone, will require an expenditure of \$10,000 to place her in complete trim, and several vessels are reported at the mills across the Sound undergoing the process of 'patching,' all of which would come here had we a dry dock in which to place them.⁷¹

The *Colonist's* plea struck a chord with its readers, some of whom wrote letters to endorse the need for a proper ship repair facility. Dr. J. C. Davie, member of the colonial legislature for Victoria District, for example, pointed out the economic benefits of ship-repair business when he wrote:

We sent out of this Colony a large sum of money last year for the repairs of our fleet, and lost the opportunity of realising a much larger sum from other vessels, because, forsooth, we had no dock into which a boat of any magnitude could be received. Nor is there the required accommodation nearer than San Francisco or the Sandwich Islands, while there is a repeated and most urgent demand for such accommodation here.⁷²

Davie argued that if the colony had a drydock, then it would become the port of choice for every vessel from the tip of Russian America (Alaska) to the mouth of the Columbia River, and would also certainly become the winter haven of the entire North Pacific whaling fleet. He concluded that the profit from repairing ships and entertaining and provisioning their crews would yield greater profits than those of the mainland gold fields. "[T]here would not be a man in any business or profession," he said, "but would be advantaged, while the smile of hope would play upon the countenance of all."⁷³

And if this were not enough to convince even the most ardent skeptics of the value and importance of the work, two days later a letter from Philip J. Hall supported Davie's arguments. Saying that he had "several years experience in dry docks and patent slips," Hall repeated much of Davie's contention that a drydock would attract ships from far and wide to the colony. He estimated, based on the prices charged by the

⁷¹ "The Necessity for a Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 24 December 1866, p. 1.

⁷² "The Dry Dock – Necessity of," *Colonist*, 15 January 1867, p. 3.

Mare Island dock, that in the two months previous a dock would have brought \$70,000 into the colony for repairs alone, and would have kept as many as fifty tradesmen profitably employed.⁷⁴ Clearly then, the people of Victoria had good reasons to believe that a drydock would be of benefit both economically and defensively, particularly as the gold rush was in decline by this time. It is not clear exactly why no private capitalists were willing to take on a project with such possibilities, but it was likely the result of an economic downturn in England. Either way, the issue again briefly left the pages of the *Colonist*.

Then, on 10 September 1867, the *Colonist* reported that the ironclad HMS *Zealous* was to be docked in the newly-built stone dock at San Francisco, at a cost of \$3,000 per day, while en route to Esquimalt.⁷⁵ As the *Zealous* was too large, at 3,700 tons, to fit inside this new dock, this report may have been fabricated to remind people of the value and importance of a drydock to the colony, particularly as the *Zealous* had already been in Esquimalt for some time when the article appeared.

Coincidentally, the previous month the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Station, Rear-Admiral the Honourable George F. Hastings, had commissioned a Board of Officers to recommend a suitable site for the construction of a drydock at Esquimalt. A report of their work was forwarded to the Colonial Secretary at Victoria on 6 August 1867, and to the Admiralty on 5 September 1867.⁷⁶ On 29 August the Assistant

⁷³ "The Dry Dock – Necessity of," *Colonist*, 15 January 1867, p. 3.

⁷⁴ "Necessity of a Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 17 January 1867, p. 1.

⁷⁵ "Dry Docking," *Colonist*, 10 September 1867, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Henry Perry (Hastings' Secretary) to Colonial Secretary, 6 August 1867, and RAdm Hastings to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 5 September 1867, Pacific Station Records.

Surveyor General of the colony had also forwarded his report on borings taken in Lang Cove to the Colonial Office with the recommendation that the work proceed.⁷⁷

There is some evidence that Rear-Admiral Hastings was being somewhat selective in what he reported to London. The Pacific Station records include two letters addressed to Hastings. One, from an Edward Hampton, a representative of a hydraulic lift dock company, recommended that a hydraulic lift dock be erected at Esquimalt, and said that his company would undertake the work on the condition that the Imperial government increase its loan for the work from £20,000 to £50,000. The second letter, from a certain John Ash, included a chart of Pedder Bay (now home of the Canadian Forces Ammunition Depot Rocky Point), and thanked Hastings for meeting him there. It also outlined in great detail Ash's plans for building a permanent stone dock in the Bay.⁷⁸ No mention of either of these plans, or of Hastings' visit to Pedder Bay, appears in any other source, including the usually well-informed *Colonist*. This suggests either that Hastings was as determined to have a permanent stone dock in Esquimalt harbour as the colony's prominent citizens were, or that he doubted the credibility of Hampton and Ash. The former, however, is more likely since even if the latter were true, Hastings likely would have forwarded their plans to the Admiralty for consideration, and corresponded with the Governor on the issue as a way of demonstrating commercial interest in the project.

Rear-Admiral Hastings' motivation may have been spurred by the continuing possibility of war with the United States, although he did not say this explicitly.

⁷⁷ Assistant Surveyor General to Colonial Secretary, 29 August 1867, Pacific Station Records; and "The Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 11 September 1867, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Edward Hampton to RAdm Hastings, 31 July 1867, Pacific Station Records; and John Ash to RAdm Hastings, 13 August 1867, Pacific Station Records.

Throughout the early 1860s tensions between the United States and Great Britain had been heightened by London's support of the Confederate cause during the Civil War. Although the war was over and tensions seemed to be decreasing, Washington's purchase of Alaska from the Russians in 1867 suggested that America's plans for expansion were far from complete, and that they may have been looking at British Columbia as the next potential acquisition.⁷⁹

Either way, after more than six years of rumour and false starts, it seemed that finally the dock was to be built. The *Colonist* on 26 February 1868 added fuel to the speculation when it reported that the Admiralty, not having been able to come to an acceptable agreement with any private company for building the dock, had advised the Imperial government to undertake the work itself. The *Colonist* also understood that "this advice was accepted by the government, and it is confidently expected that despatches authorising the commencement of the dock will arrive in a mail or two."⁸⁰

Alas, their anticipation was premature, as no correspondence arrived on the subject from London until the following August. That correspondence reported that yet another private company had been formed with the object of carrying out the work with the assistance of an Imperial loan guarantee. Much to his chagrin, the editor also learned that it was to be a floating dock rather than a stone one.⁸¹ Two weeks later, on 28 August, the *Colonist* reported that it was to be a hydraulic lift dock large enough to hold the *Zealous*, and that it would be ready for use in eighteen months time. This, the newspaper believed, was better than a floating dock, and certainly better than no dock

⁷⁹ Taylor, *Shipyards of British Columbia*, p. 55.

⁸⁰ "The Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 26 February 1868, p. 2.

⁸¹ "The Esquimalt Dock," *Colonist*, 13 August 1868, p. 1; "The Dock," *Colonist*, 17 August 1868, p. 1.

at all. However, it made clear that “some of our people” still opposed anything short of a stone dock.⁸²

Surprisingly, the *Colonist* said nothing more until March 1869, when it urged the colonial government to guarantee loans for local capitalists interested in carrying out the project.⁸³ Its argument became more powerful another year later when HMS *Charybdis* ran aground again, and had to be sent to San Francisco for repairs.⁸⁴ By then, however, the citizens of Victoria had another great project on their minds – Confederation.

On 18 March 1870, the *Colonist* published, as it usually did, the transcript from the most recent meeting of the Legislative Council of British Columbia. What made this meeting different is that the main topic of discussion was the proposed union between British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada. Although the Terms of Union and the debates surrounding them will be discussed in depth in Chapter II, it is useful to mention them here, as first topic on the agenda was the long-delayed graving dock. The discussion was not so much over whether it would be included in the Terms of Union as whether or not its location would be specified. Various arguments were presented in favour of and against Esquimalt, Nanaimo, New Westminster and Burrard Inlet, or for specifying no location at all. In the end, the Council decided to specify Esquimalt since it had been recommended by both the previous Governor and Commander-in-Chief, and because its proximity to the Naval Station made it attractive to the Imperial government, the support of which was still required.⁸⁵

⁸² “The Dock,” *Colonist*, 28 August 1868, p. 3.

⁸³ “Our Temporary Loans,” *Colonist*, 8 March 1869, p. 3.

⁸⁴ “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 2 March 1870, p. 1.

⁸⁵ “Legislative Council,” *Colonist*, 18 March 1870, p. 3.

And so, when British Columbia signed the Terms of Union and became a province of the Dominion of Canada on 20 July 1871, along with sections covering the assumption of debt and the building of the transcontinental railway, Section XII provided that:

The Dominion Government shall guarantee the interest for ten years from the date of the completion of the works at the rate of five per cent per annum, on such sum, not exceeding £100,000 sterling, as may be required for the construction of a first-class graving dock at Esquimalt.⁸⁶

Finally, it was down in writing. After all of the years of waiting and frustration, the dock was to be built – and a fine stone dock at that. Indeed, little more than a month after B.C. entered Confederation, the Honourable Hector Langevin, federal Minister of Public Works, visited Esquimalt to view the harbour and undertake discussions with his provincial counterpart on how the work was to proceed. The *Colonist* reported that tenders would be called for shortly after his return to Ottawa.⁸⁷ And unlike the previous false starts, this time it happened. True to the words of Langevin and the *Colonist*, on 21 November 1871 the call for tenders was published in several newspapers in Canada and Great Britain.⁸⁸

It had taken many years – through many Governors, Commanders-in-Chief and *Colonist* editors, but finally the dock's construction seemed to be guaranteed. Everyone involved was certain that once the tenders were received and the contract signed, it would only be a matter of months, perhaps a year or two, until the long awaited dock could accept its first customer. They could not know how wrong they were, that it

⁸⁶ Terms of Union between the Crown Colony of British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada, 20 July 1871.

⁸⁷ “Esquimalt Dry Dock,” *Colonist*, 23 September 1871, p. 3; and “The Dry Dock,” *Colonist*, 24 September 1871, p. 3.

⁸⁸ “Public Notice – Esquimalt Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 21 November 1871, p. 2.

would be another sixteen years before their goal was finally realized. But they were right about one thing – it *would* be realized.

Chapter II

Type, Location, Confederation and the Terms of Union

After the issuing of the “Request for Tenders” in November 1871, the proponents of the drydock must certainly have felt that the long-awaited object of their desires would be ready for use within a year or two at most. As it happened, more than sixteen years passed before the first ship entered the drydock – two years longer than was required to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway. The reasons for this delay are many, but as with most large projects the main issues centered around politics and money. To fully explain these issues, it is necessary to look back to 1867, four years before B.C.’s entry into Confederation.

As might be expected of such a huge project, several communities lobbied for it. As in the case of the naval station, the only locations which were seriously considered were Esquimalt, Nanaimo, and Burrard Inlet. In 1867 the Admiralty had instructed Rear-Admiral Hastings to report on the facilities available on the station for docking the vessels of the squadron, and to make recommendations for future improvements. To accomplish this, Hastings commissioned a board of officers composed of the Commanding and senior officers of the vessels then in Esquimalt, as well as the flagship's carpenter, to examine where the dock should be located and determine the type of dock required.⁸⁹ The board concluded that Lang Cove at Esquimalt offered the best location for the building of a dock, and that while a graving dock would “be in all

⁸⁹ RAdm Hastings to Governor Seymour, 20 August 1867, Pacific Station Records.

respects superior to any other,” a floating dock should be considered as it could be constructed much more quickly.⁹⁰

In October 1867, Rear-Admiral Hastings personally visited all three locations, and reached the same conclusions.⁹¹ But the discussions did not end there. Governor Sir Frederick Seymour indicated that while he would defer to Hastings’ professional judgement, he felt that Burrard Inlet had certain unassailable advantages.⁹² In his subsequent letter to the Colonial Secretary in London, Seymour argued that in the event of a war in which the Royal Navy was defeated in the North Pacific, British warships could withdraw “fifteen or sixteen miles up the inlet,” leaving men and guns near the narrow entrance to prevent an enemy following.⁹³

It is interesting that although the British Empire was at its height, the Governor of a British colony was discussing the possibility of being “worsted” by an enemy. Seymour’s comments seem even more remarkable given that Esquimalt had already been established as the best location for a naval station, and described by numerous sources as being easily defensible. Moreover, the military presence of the United States, the most likely source of attack, was just as negligible as that of Britain in the North Pacific.

One possible reason for this unlikely argument is that Seymour had previously established himself in New Westminster, which was near Burrard Inlet and had been the capital of British Columbia before the unification of the two colonies in 1866.⁹⁴ It is possible that Seymour still wanted New Westminster to be named the capital of the

⁹⁰ Report of Board of Officers to RAdm Hastings, 31 July 1867, Pacific Station Records.

⁹¹ RAdm Hastings to Governor Seymour, 16 October 1867, Pacific Station Records.

⁹² Governor Seymour to RAdm Hastings, 31 October 1867, Pacific Station Records.

⁹³ Governor Seymour to Colonial Secretary, 6 February 1868, Pacific Station Records.

united colonies, and promoted Burrard Inlet in the hopes of furthering that cause. In any event, he concluded that: “A dock in Esquimalt or Burrard Inlet would ... be equally valuable to the colony in time of peace, and I hope no hesitation I may feel as to the wisdom of Admiral Hastings’ selection may stand in the way of his recommendation.”⁹⁵ Clearly, then, even to those who supported the development of other communities, a dock at Esquimalt was preferable to no dock at all.

The Colonial Secretary’s reply to Governor Seymour made it clear that the Royal Navy and the Imperial government agreed with the choice of Esquimalt. The Colonial Secretary intimated as much in a letter dated 15 May 1868, which included a copy of a memorandum written by the Hydrographer of the Navy, George Henry Richards. In the Memorandum, which had been endorsed by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, Richards stated that based on his many years of experience:

Esquimalt Harbor [*sic*] is the fittest place for a naval dock, and that the spot recommended by Admiral Hastings is the best that could be selected. Esquimalt is and always must be the principal seaport in these colonies. What naval works we have are there. Esquimalt is easy of defence, and an enemy could not injure a dock there unless he got possession of the place – and there is no reason why he could not get possession of Burrard Inlet as easily as Esquimalt. A vessel arriving at Esquimalt damaged would have to be towed one hundred (100) miles before she would reach Burrard Inlet. Unless Esquimalt is abandoned as the naval headquarters, and all the establishments removed to Burrard Inlet, which I do not contemplate as possible, then I do not think it possible to entertain the question of a Government dock at Burrard Inlet.⁹⁶

This summary dismissal of the argument by the Admiralty and the Colonial Office did not end the discussion. What is important to remember is that this was taking place three years *before* the signing of the Terms of Union, and almost four years before the

⁹⁴ Governor Seymour to RAdm Hastings, 31 October 1867, Pacific Station Records; and Governor Seymour to Colonial Secretary, 6 February 1868, Pacific Station Records.

⁹⁵ Governor Seymour to Colonial Secretary, 6 February 1868, Pacific Station Records.

“Request for Tenders” was issued. It must also be noted that both the colonial government and its citizens wanted a dock built and operated by private capitalists, not government. As the *Colonist* later wrote:

[W]e do not counsel the construction of the Dock by Government, which would be anything but a profitable investment of the taxpayers’ money, in view of the inevitable jobbery that would follow any undertaking of the kind by the Executive.⁹⁷

As far as the *Colonist* was concerned, Esquimalt may well have been the best place, but in the end the dock’s capitalist builders should determine its location. As will be seen, this attitude changed abruptly as it became more evident that any monetary contribution from the Imperial government, specifically the Admiralty, would hinge upon Esquimalt as the location.

While the question of location would not go away, there was general agreement that, contrary to the suggestion of the Board of Officers, a floating dock was not under consideration. Recalling the problems of HMS *Termagant*, a *Colonist* correspondent explained:

The Mare Island Dock is not a dry dock, but a sectional floating dock – that is, sections are sunk under the ship to lift her, and if so happens at times that the fore and after sections of the dock will have the water pumped out so fast that the ship is almost hanging by her bow and stern, causing the ship to strain very badly. Sometimes the centre sections are raised first, causing the ship to hang by the midships, thereby hogging her. Again, a short heavy ship they are not capable of taking out, which was proven by one of our old second class frigates, a few years since. They could not get sections enough under her to raise her, and broke the dock down in the attempt, for which (of course) John Bull had to pay thirty thousand dollars to the dock company for allowing them to ruin the ship.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Colonial Secretary to Governor Seymour, 15 May 1868, Pacific Station Records.

⁹⁷ Untitled Editorial, *Colonist*, 8 March 1869, p. 1.

⁹⁸ “Necessity of a Dry Dock,” *Colonist*, 17 January 1867, p. 3.

Whatever the reason, there no longer seemed to be any question of what kind of dock would be built. The interested parties, including the colonial government and the Admiralty, all agreed that the dock would be big, it would be first-class, and it would be permanent. This issue was not raised again until after British Columbia joined Confederation, and then only briefly by the Dominion government.⁹⁹

It is important to note that before Confederation, British Columbia did not have “Responsible Government” and was ruled directly by the Governor. To assist him, the Governor had an appointed Legislative Council. This Council was composed of several members who were directly appointed by the Governor to fill positions such as Attorney-General or Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, several “Magisterial members” who were appointed without portfolio, and several more members who represented the different regions of the colony. Although nominally “elected” by the enfranchised voters of their district, these latter members were also appointed. Hence, if the Governor did not want the person “elected” by a particular district to sit on the Council, he was under no obligation to accept him and could simply appoint someone else in his place.¹⁰⁰

The question of location arose again during the debates of the Legislative Council over the Terms of Union with Canada. The issue came to a head at the Council meeting of 16 March 1870. The adoption of Clause 4, as it was then designated, was the first order of business that day, and although the debate was relatively brief, it

⁹⁹ “Deputation to the Hon. Minister of Works,” *Colonist*, 23 September 1871, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ James E. Hendrickson, “The Constitutional Development of Colonial Vancouver Island and British Columbia,” in W. P. Ward and R. A. J. McDonald, eds., *British Columbia: Historical Readings*. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1981), pp. 245-274.

touched upon almost all of the issues of the previous decade. As Attorney General H. P. P. Crease first read the Clause to the Council, it stated that:

The Dominion Government shall guarantee Interest at the rate of 5 per cent per annum on such sum, not exceeding £100,000, as may be required for the construction of a first class Graving Dock at Esquimalt.¹⁰¹

In his accompanying remarks, Crease noted that the sum of £100,000 seemed to be sufficient. He also stated that, although he was aware of some opposition to the idea, specifying Esquimalt as the location of the dock was necessary to guarantee the support of the Admiralty, without which “the thing could not succeed.” He added that since, in his opinion, the transcontinental railway must come down the Fraser River valley and terminate at New Westminster or Burrard Inlet, it was only fair that Victoria and Esquimalt receive the benefit of the Graving Dock.¹⁰²

Henry Holbrook, a Magisterial member who had previously been Mayor of New Westminster, opposed the Clause, moving that the locality be omitted, and arguing that perhaps a dock was not needed at all. He surmised that if a dock of some kind were required, a patent slip might be better than a stone dock. He noted that some citizens had asked him to support the substitution of Burrard Inlet for Esquimalt in the Clause, but that he would not do so. Instead, he preferred to leave the question of location to the Dominion government. The member for Lillooet, Thomas Humphreys, “could not understand any opposition to th[e] Clause,” since the building of the dock would benefit the whole of the province regardless of where it was built. Furthermore, he could not

¹⁰¹ James E. Hendrickson, ed., Journals of the Colonial Legislatures of the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, 1851-1871 – Volume IV. (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1980), p. 497.

¹⁰² Hendrickson, ed., Journals of the Colonial Legislatures, pp. 497-498.

accept that no dock was needed, as it was not desirable to have ships go to San Francisco when they could be repaired in B.C..¹⁰³

John Robson, member for New Westminster, former editor of the *British Columbian*, and at that time editor of the *Colonist*, agreed with Holbrook in the matter of specifying no location, but thought that the inclusion of the word ‘Esquimalt’ was “perfectly harmless.” In the end, he said, “[t]he dock will no doubt be built in the most suitable place.”¹⁰⁴ Whether these comments are more indicative of his role as New Westminster’s representative or as the editor of Victoria’s largest newspaper is unclear. T. L. Wood, another Magisterial member, believed that including Esquimalt in the Clause was “an endeavour to purchase the good-will of Victoria, whose population [was] known to be anti-confederate.”

In refuting that, the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Joseph Trutch, restated many of the Attorney General’s earlier comments, and pointed out that naval officers and engineers alike had chosen Esquimalt as the best location. He also denied that the government had any “sectional prejudice” on the issue. Trutch’s statements were then endorsed by Robson, as well as the member for Nanaimo, David Ring, the member for Victoria District, Amor De Cosmos, the senior member for Victoria City, Dr. Helmcken, and the member for Cariboo, Robert Carrall.¹⁰⁵

Debate then continued on the issue of whether the Clause should specify the type of dock to be built. De Cosmos, who had visited dockyards in the United States, said that he would support the Clause regardless, but thought that a patent slip might be more useful than a stone dock. Furthermore, he was not sure that £100,000 would be a

¹⁰³ Hendrickson, ed., *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures*, p. 498.

¹⁰⁴ Hendrickson, ed., *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures*, p. 498.

sufficient sum. Chief Commissioner Trutch and M. W. T. Drake, junior member for Victoria City, agreed. Drake then moved that the sum be changed to £150,000.¹⁰⁶

When the two amendments were voted upon, only Holbrook and Wood favoured omitting the word 'Esquimalt' from the Clause, while only eight of the twenty-one members voted to raise the sum to £150,000. Thus, the Clause was passed as it had been read by the Attorney General.¹⁰⁷ Under it, the Dominion would be required to guarantee to the creditors of the as yet undetermined dock-building company that Canada would pay 5% interest on a loan of £100,000 if that company was unable to pay it themselves. This proposed guarantee then formed part of the draft Terms of Union taken to Ottawa by British Columbia's delegates later that year.

Despite this, in the late summer and early autumn of 1870 some citizens of Nanaimo and New Westminster unsuccessfully attempted to re-open the question of location yet again.¹⁰⁸ As noted above, the *Colonist*, which had been advocating Esquimalt as the location since the building of the dock had first been suggested, was now under the editorship of John Robson. It now took a much more non-committal view, saying that the question "must be decided by competent engineers."¹⁰⁹ Conversely, the *Standard*, edited by Amor De Cosmos, reported that "opinion everywhere seemed by common consent to admit that Esquimalt was the most suitable place;" while the *Mainland Guardian* of New Westminster "assume[d] that Esquimalt

¹⁰⁵ Hendrickson, ed., *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures*, pp. 498-500.

¹⁰⁶ Hendrickson, ed., *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures*, pp. 500-501; and F. W. Howay, *British Columbia: From the Earliest Times to the Present, Volume II*. (Vancouver: S. J. Clarke Publishing, 1914), pp. 251-252.

¹⁰⁷ Hendrickson, ed., *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures*, p. 501 and "Legislative Council." *Colonist*, 18 March 1870, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ "Nanaimo a Most Eligible Place for a Graving Dock," *Colonist*, 31 July 1870, p. 1; "The Graving Dock," *Colonist*, 14 August 1870, p. 1; "The Graving Dock at Esquimalt," *Victoria Daily Standard*, 13 August 1870, p. 2; and "The Graving Dock," *Mainland Guardian*, 10 September 1870, p. 1.

[was] the proper site for the Graving Dock.”¹¹⁰ Opposing them were the “Voice from the Inlet,” an otherwise unidentified individual who lamented the choice of Esquimalt in the pages of the *Guardian*, and “Economist,” who wrote to the *Colonist* to advocate Nanaimo in its stead.¹¹¹

By this time, however, the argument was moot. On 17 July 1870 the *Colonist* reported rumours from Ottawa indicating that Clause 4 had been accepted by the Dominion negotiators as Section XII of the Terms of Union, and indeed it had.¹¹² According to Dr. J. S. Helmcken, member for Victoria City, who was one of British Columbia’s delegates, the graving dock question had proved a bigger “stumbling block” than expected, because the federal government feared that Ontario and Québec would object to it as a purely local work. At first, the Dominion’s spokesmen thought that in the event of such objections, a dock-building guarantee similar to that sought by British Columbia could be extended to any province that wanted it.¹¹³ However, after further consideration the Canadian negotiators decided that such a guarantee would raise too many questions in the House of Commons. “After long argument on both sides and cold determination” on that of B.C.’s delegates, Helmcken reported that “a modification of the clause was agreed to, making the limit of the guarantee ten years.”¹¹⁴ It was further specified that the guarantee was to commence on “the date of the completion of the works.” The Dominion government still wanted to reduce the

¹⁰⁹ “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 14 August 1870, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ “The Graving Dock at Esquimalt,” *Standard*, 13 August 1870, p. 2; and “The Graving Dock,” *Mainland Guardian*, 10 September 1870, p. 1.

¹¹¹ “The Graving Dock,” *Mainland Guardian*, 10 September 1870, p. 1; “Nanaimo,” *Standard*, 12 August 1870, p. 3; and “Nanaimo a Most Eligible Place for a Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 31 July 1870, p. 1.

¹¹² “The Dry Dock,” *Colonist*, 17 July 1870, p. 3.

¹¹³ Dorothy B. Smith, ed., *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken*. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975), pp. 261, 351.

¹¹⁴ Smith, ed., *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken*, p. 353.

amount of the guarantee, but the British Columbians refused to budge and the Canadians “had to give in, which they gracefully did but considered that it was the hardest thing they had to swallow.”¹¹⁵ The question of the dock’s location, which had occasioned so much debate in British Columbia, apparently did not even elicit comment during the actual negotiations.

Despite the fears of the negotiators, the graving dock did not become a contentious issue in the House of Commons. In fact, it seems to have come up only once, and even then only as an example of how the Dominion’s negotiators had imposed restrictions upon some of British Columbia’s demands. In this example, the Finance Minister, S. L. Tilley, explained to the House that British Columbia had wanted the guarantee of £100,000 to extend “in perpetuity,” but had been forced to accept a time limit of ten years, by which time the railway would be complete and would guarantee steady business for the dock.¹¹⁶ Not surprisingly, an examination of the Parliamentary reports and editorial comments of the *Toronto Globe* and the *Ottawa Citizen* shows that Parliamentarians and journalists alike were much more concerned about the Pacific Railway, estimated to cost between \$100,000,000 and \$200,000,000, than they were about the graving dock.¹¹⁷

Back in British Columbia, the time limit of ten years had become a potential problem long before the Terms went before the Commons. The first hint of this came in a *Colonist* editorial in November 1870. In order to determine their willingness to proceed with the project, the *Colonist* had referred Section XII to a group of London

¹¹⁵ Smith, ed., *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken*, pp. 355-356.

¹¹⁶ “Dominion Parliament,” *The Toronto Globe*, 29 March 1871, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Parliamentary Reports and Editorial Commentaries in *The Toronto Globe* and the *Ottawa Citizen*, 28 March – 3 April 1871.

capitalists who had previously shown some interest in constructing the dock. Somewhat alarmingly to the newspaper's editor, they were not interested. Ten years, they said, was too short of a guarantee, and they also wanted interest chargeable from the date of the dock's commencement, rather than its completion. The *Colonist* argued that British Columbia's delegates should prevail upon the Dominion government to amend the terms to meet the capitalists' demands. "If the guarantee be for so short a period," it argued, "or the time at which the interest is to commence be so unsatisfactory that capital cannot be found to complete the works, then Esquimalt will be deprived of her dock, and the benefits which it was expected to confer upon her cannot be realized."¹¹⁸

That this was an important issue in British Columbia is demonstrated by the fact that it occasioned even more comment than the question of the dock's location. To many British Columbians, particularly those on Vancouver Island, the drydock was as important as the railway. On 10 November 1870, the *Standard* noted that, in terms of merchant marine tonnage, Canada was already the third largest maritime nation in the world after Great Britain and the United States. "Fate," it said, "has evidently decreed a proud maritime destiny to British Columbia as a part of the Dominion; and ... Victoria and Esquimalt will become renowned in the history of Canada on the Pacific Ocean."¹¹⁹ Clearly the drydock was meant to play an important part in shaping that destiny. As the *Colonist* asserted on 23 November 1870, "[t]he subject of the construction of a Dry

¹¹⁸ "The Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 16 November 1870, p. 1; and "The Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 16 November 1870, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ "Canada on the Ocean," *Standard*, 10 November 1870, p. 2.

Dock at Esquimalt, as one of the stipulated conditions of Confederation, ... appears to demand supreme attention at the present moment.”¹²⁰

The *Colonist* maintained that it was in the Dominion’s best interest for the development of its future Pacific trade to ensure that the drydock was built and that it was of appropriate size and durability to fulfil present and future needs. It agreed that the sum guaranteed by the Terms of Union might not be sufficient, but accepted that because the guarantee was only meant to *encourage* private capitalists, not build the dock for them. The editor also knew that Admiralty support would be required to make the undertaking profitable, and that certain concessions would have to be made in exchange for their support. That was all well and good, he surmised, unless no capitalists were willing to undertake the work. This, the *Colonist* believed, would not be a problem. The Terms could simply be amended to guarantee the capitalists’ interest for twenty or even thirty years, as “it should be remembered that the interest is only *guaranteed*, not necessarily *paid*.” As the Dominion government would only be responsible for making good any *deficiency* in revenues amounting to five per cent of, at most, £100,000, to extend the guarantee would not cost anything unless the dock proved a failure. And this, in almost everyone’s view, was highly unlikely.¹²¹

Thus some British Columbians, the *Colonist*’s editor included, demanded action to affirm that the Terms of Union would ensure that English capitalists would be willing to undertake the project. In summarizing their arguments, he asked:

Are we to accept the Terms without a question, trusting to the *bona fides* of the Dominion Government to make any extension which may afterwards be found necessary in order to inducing [*sic*] an English company to undertake the construction of the Dock? Or shall the Governor be requested to ascertain

¹²⁰ “The Dry Dock,” *Colonist*, 23 November 1870, p. 1.

¹²¹ “The Dry Dock,” *Colonist*, 23 November 1870, p. 1.

whether the Canadian Government will agree to meet the fresh difficulty? For our own part, we do not hesitate to express implicit confidence in the good faith of the Dominion Government. Yet, in consideration of those who may be of a less confiding turn, it would probably be as well that the willingness of the Cabinet at Ottawa to meet our necessities in this respect should be placed beyond the possibility of doubt *before* Confederation is accepted.¹²²

Clearly, the question of the Dominion government's guarantee on the financing of the project had the potential to de-rail, or at the very least delay, British Columbia's entry into Confederation. What should have been equally clear, at least to those, like Dr. Helmcken, who had gone to Ottawa with the Terms, was that the Dominion government was unlikely to budge. The Canadian government was, after all, the party which had demanded the time limit in the first place.

Discussion of the issue continued for quite some time, both in the public forum of the *Colonist's* pages and in the chambers of the Legislative Council. Among the solutions contemplated was the addition of a guarantee by the British Columbia government, to take effect for an additional ten years after the end of the Dominion government's obligations.¹²³ In the end, such efforts proved unsuccessful, apparently owing to a bitter rivalry between some members of the new Legislative Council, who had been "elected" or appointed in November 1870.¹²⁴

The *Colonist*, on 7 January 1871 gave the first public indication that the Canadian government might not be willing to amend the terms when it reported that:

In arranging terms for the admission of British Columbia into the Dominion the Cabinet had to be very careful about giving anything to this colony which would appear to be exceptionally favourable to it, as distinguished from other colonies in, or about to come into, the Dominion.¹²⁵

¹²² "The Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 23 November 1870, p. 1.

¹²³ "Work for the People," *Colonist*, 17 December 1870, p. 1; and "The Graving Dock," *Colonist*, 6 January 1871, p. 1.

¹²⁴ "The Graving Dock," *Colonist*, 7 January 1871, p. 3; "The Graving Dock," *Colonist*, 11 January 1871, p. 1; and "The Esquimalt Graving Dock," *Standard*, 12 January 1871, p. 2.

¹²⁵ "The Graving Dock," *Colonist*, 7 January 1871, p. 3.

In other words, Ottawa could not guarantee to one province something that it was not prepared to guarantee to all. The fact that this article so closely echoed one of the concerns of the Canadian negotiators, as reported by Dr. Helmcken, is probably not coincidental. The members of the Council were clearly reluctant to re-open the Terms and thereby risk delaying or de-railing Confederation. This also explains why, when the Terms of Union came to a vote for final acceptance in the Legislative Council meeting of 18 January 1871, the only amendment to Section XII sought was by Arthur Bunster, the new member for Nanaimo, who Howay describes as having “small conception of the great work being done.” His motion, predictably, was that his own city be substituted for Esquimalt as the location of the dock. This was not seconded, and the Section was “passed amidst great applause.”¹²⁶

After the Council had approved all of the Terms, it agreed to make representations to the Canadian government through the Governor, to ask that Section XII be amended to reflect the requirements of the English capitalists.¹²⁷ It is important to note at this point that Governor Seymour, who did not support Confederation, had died in June 1869 and been replaced by Anthony Musgrave. The new Governor, who had been appointed on the recommendation of Sir John A. Macdonald, was much more enthusiastic about Confederation than his predecessor, and in any event had been instructed by the British government to encourage it. He was therefore considered to have a good chance of favourably influencing Ottawa on the issue of the drydock

¹²⁶ Howay, *British Columbia*, p. 297.

¹²⁷ Hendrickson, *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures...*, pp. 394-395; “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 20 January 1871, p. 1; “Legislative Council,” *Colonist*, 24 January 1871, p. 1; “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 24 January 1871, p. 1; and “Legislative Council,” *Standard*, 24 January 1871, p. 3.

guarantee.¹²⁸ What form these representations took, or even whether they actually took place at all is open to question, since nothing more was said on the issue, and Section XII of the Terms remained unchanged.

Despite this, when an anonymous letter from England appeared in the *Standard* the following March attacking the motives of the Canadian government, and predicting that neither the drydock nor the railway would ever be built, the *Colonist* lashed out in the Dominion's defence. The letter implied that the Canadian government only agreed to the Terms because it knew that no capitalists would take on either the railway or the drydock project. The *Colonist* replied that "[a]ll this must appear very silly to the public, who will know that the Canadian Government just guaranteed what the colony asked in respect of the Dry Dock, and more than it asked in respect of the railway. ... No doubt some persons would wish the railway to turn out a myth, just because they opposed it and predicted it could never be built. Some men are contemptible enough to prefer the verification of their maudlin predictions to the public weal."¹²⁹ And this appears to have settled the matter, once and for all. The Terms of Union remained as they had been before the debate about the guarantee began, nothing more was said about it in the public forum. Indeed, nothing more was said about the Graving Dock, period, until 18 July 1871, two days before British Columbia officially joined the Dominion. Even then, the *Colonist's* comments were limited to an article gushing over the positive influence that the dock was sure to have on the commercial and maritime prosperity of Canada's newest province.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Howay, *British Columbia*, pp. 288-291.

¹²⁹ "The Railway and Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 18 March 1871, p. 1.

¹³⁰ "The Graving Dock," *Colonist*, 18 July 1871, p. 1.

Through great perseverance, the drydock's many supporters had secured what they believed was a certain guarantee of the dock's construction. They had established that it would be "first-class," to them meaning built of stone, and they had established that it would be built at Esquimalt. All that remained was to build it.

Chapter III

Early Provincial Efforts to Build the Dock

Within days of British Columbia officially joining Confederation, Governor Musgrave was replaced by a new Lieutenant-Governor, the former Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Joseph Trutch. He, in turn, called upon J. F. McCreight, who had been acting Attorney-General during the last days of Musgrave's administration, to form a government and become B.C.'s first Premier. McCreight assembled a temporary Cabinet from the members of the old Legislative Council, to serve until elections could be held. The temporary Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, the man who would be responsible for getting the drydock project under way, was Henry Holbrook, the same man who, during the Confederation debates, had not only questioned Esquimalt as the location for the dock, but had also questioned the necessity of even building it. Despite his earlier reservations, however, Holbrook dutifully issued the call for tenders and had it printed in several Canadian and British newspapers in November 1871. After the elections were completed in December, Holbrook was replaced as Chief Commissioner by George A. Walkem, member for Cariboo, who then took responsibility for pushing the graving dock ahead.¹³¹

The Autumn 1871 visit to Esquimalt of Hector Langevin, the Dominion Minister of Public Works, in addition to the call for tenders by the provincial government, quite reasonably convinced the interested parties that construction would soon begin. During his visit, however, Langevin re-opened some of the outstanding points of contention, as well as some which had been thought settled. First, he made it

clear that any monies to be guaranteed beyond those covered by the Terms of Union would have to be by the provincial or Imperial governments. It was only fair, he argued, because those governments stood to gain the most as a result of its construction. Secondly, he re-opened the issue of the permanency of the dock by suggesting that a floating “iron dock similar to the Victoria Dock at London would answer” the maritime needs of the province. He did admit, however, that “the Admiralty might object to their ships being allowed to go on any but a stone graving dock.”¹³²

On 23 November 1871, the same day it published the call for tenders, the *Colonist* responded to Langevin’s visit by commenting that “professional and scientific men” should make the final decision about the location and type of dock, giving consideration to serviceability, economy and benefit. While the *Colonist* admitted that a floating drydock would meet commercial needs, it argued it would be too ‘weak’ to serve the Royal Navy’s largest warships and, since it would be built elsewhere, would deny the province the benefit of construction jobs.¹³³

The official report of Langevin’s visit, published the following year, put to rest any fears which may have arisen as a result of his earlier comments. “The graving dock,” he wrote, “is one of the public works to which the highest importance is attached in [British] Columbia, at least in Vancouver Island.”¹³⁴ He considered its construction to be “absolutely necessary for the navy as well as for the merchant service,” and explained that Esquimalt was the correct location because of its physical suitability and convenient location relative to Burrard Inlet and Puget Sound. Langevin concluded by

¹³¹ Howay, *British Columbia*, pp. 329-330.

¹³² “Deputation to the Hon. Minister of Works,” *Colonist*, 23 September 1871, p. 3; and “Interview With the Minister of Public Works with Regard to the Dry Dock,” *Standard*, 23 September 1871, p. 3.

¹³³ “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 23 November 1871, p. 1.

noting that “[f]ears appeared to be entertained that the guarantee afforded by the Canadian government would not be sufficient, but on the other hand the importance of having the dock, not only to Canada generally, but especially to the province and to the Imperial Naval Service, was thoroughly appreciated.”¹³⁵ Attached as an appendix to his report were copies of the colonial correspondence on the subject of the graving dock, including the memorandum from George Richards, Hydrographer of the Navy, quoted earlier.

While the people of British Columbia must have felt re-assured by Langevin’s report, they had to wait to see what tenders were submitted to the government. The deadline for this was noon on 20 March 1872. The *Colonist* and the *Standard* both pointed out on 14 February that if the provincial legislature did not pass a Bill that session to allow the expropriation of land for the drydock, work could not commence until the next session dealt with the issue, presumably in the Autumn of 1872.¹³⁶ Perhaps sensing trouble, both newspapers urged the provincial government to take whatever action was required to secure the construction of the dock. “Let us hope,” wrote the *Standard*, “... that the day is not far off when the first blow shall be struck in the prosecution of a work that will exert untold advantages upon the commercial and maritime interests of this province.”¹³⁷

In the event, the only tender received was from a local civil engineer, Thomas Bulkley, who represented a company of English capitalists.¹³⁸ As predicted, they were

¹³⁴ Canada. *Report of the Hon. H. L. Langevin, C.B., Minister of Public Works*. (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1872), p. 44.

¹³⁵ Canada. *Report of the Hon. H. L. Langevin*, pp. 44-45.

¹³⁶ “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 14 February 1872, p. 1; and “The Graving Dock,” *Standard*, 14 February 1872, p. 2.

¹³⁷ “The Graving Dock,” *Standard*, 14 February 1872, p. 2.

¹³⁸ “The Dry-Dock,” *Colonist*, 24 March 1872, p. 1.

not willing to construct the dock under the existing terms of Section XII, and had based their tender upon the minimum terms they required – that is, a government interest guarantee of 6% on £130,000 for a minimum of thirty years. Not surprisingly, the government publicly rejected this tender as unreasonable and delayed further action until it could devise a way to attract capitalists who would work under the terms of Section XII. The *Colonist* approved of this course of action.¹³⁹

This new plan was devised very quickly, and on 27 April the government issued a new call for tenders. In the meantime it had hired Thomas Bulkley as Chief Engineer to the government. As such, he would oversee the dock's construction for the Lands and Works Office. More significant, however, was a reduction in the required dimensions of the dock itself. Instead of being a minimum of 450 feet long, it only needed to be 400 feet; and instead of being 50 feet wide at the bottom, it needed to be only 45 feet across. Clearly, the provincial government expected that the reduced dimensions would induce capitalists to undertake the work under the terms of Section XII, although allowance was made for people who still considered those terms insufficient to submit a tender based upon additional financial inducements from the province.¹⁴⁰

However, as the *Colonist* pointed out the following July, in its first commentary since the new call for tenders was issued, the new plan seemed likely to produce the same result as the first. It felt that the first tendering process had failed because the government had simply provided the required dimensions and left it up to the interested parties to develop their own plans and specifications. These were naturally high, as

¹³⁹ “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 6 April 1872, p. 1; and “Recess Work,” *Colonist*, 19 April 1872, p. 1.

none of them had access to the borings or any other information about the site, and planned for the ‘worst-case’ scenario. It was to remedy this the government had hired Bulkley to oversee the project and provide plans and specifications to interested parties so that they could make accurate estimates. The second call for tenders would also fail, the *Colonist* argued, because although the plans had been made clear, the tendering process now required the capitalists to include the time within which the dock would be completed, the amount of materials required and the mode of construction. No capitalist, the editor felt, would be willing to conduct such a large project under such potential restrictions.¹⁴¹

By 30 October 1872, two weeks before the final date for accepting tenders, when none had yet been received, the *Colonist* considered its point made. In a virulent attack on the provincial government, it called the whole process a farce and indicated that it expected that the government would be forced to choose between further delay and bad terms.¹⁴² The same day, the *Standard* printed a report prepared by Bulkley which compared the relative costs of building in different coves in Esquimalt harbour, but made no editorial comment on either the report or the situation in general.¹⁴³ In the end, the *Colonist*’s prediction was correct. No tenders were received at the Lands and Works Office, and Chief Commissioner Walkem announced a further delay.

Before the McCreight government could devise a new plan, it fell apart. The first session of the legislature had been marred by sectional squabbles over the number of salaried positions given to the mainland and Vancouver Island, respectively, and by

¹⁴⁰ “British Columbia – Esquimalt Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 28 April 1872, p. 1; and “Public Notice – Esquimalt Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 21 November 1871, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 4 July 1872, p. 1.

¹⁴² “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 30 October 1872, p. 1.

the government's refusal to increase members' sessional allowances. During the recess the opposition was strengthened by defections from the government benches. Within four days of the second session opening on 17 December, McCreight was defeated on a motion of non-confidence, with even his own ministers voting against him. McCreight formally resigned on 24 December, and was replaced as Premier by Amor De Cosmos. George Walkem, who had defected from the previous government, became Attorney-General, while Robert Beaven, member for Victoria City, became the new Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works.¹⁴⁴

The delay occasioned by the failure of the tendering process and the change of government ended in February 1873, when the De Cosmos government announced its intentions to the public. Firstly, the province would ask the Dominion government to amend the terms of the guarantee to increase the amount from £100,000 to £120,000, the rate of interest from five to seven and a half per cent, and the length from ten years to twenty. This, they felt, would be enough to induce a private capitalist to undertake the work. Secondly, if the Dominion government was unwilling to amend the terms, the province would ask it to build the dock as a federal work. Should these first two options both fail, then the province would simply ask the Dominion government for a lump sum in lieu of the guarantee, which would enable it to undertake the dock as a provincial work.¹⁴⁵ This plan became known as the "First Dry Dock Scheme."

The British Columbia legislature agreed that these matters should be taken up with the federal government at the earliest opportunity. However, a motion to strike a

¹⁴³ "Provincial Advertisement," *Standard*, 30 October 1872, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Howay, *British Columbia*, pp. 331-334.

¹⁴⁵ "The Graving Dock Scheme," *Colonist*, 4 February 1873, p. 1; and "First Parliament of British Columbia," *Standard*, 5 February 1873, p. 3.

Select Committee to recommend the best way to proceed was defeated, and nothing more was heard publicly from the provincial government for several months – a silence which contrasted starkly with the debate in the pages of Victoria’s newspapers. On 14 March one citizen pointed out that the dock, as then proposed, would not be large enough to hold the newest ironclads of the Royal Navy, and should therefore be larger. On 16 April another citizen pointed out that a floating dock was better than no dock, and urged constructing a relatively inexpensive sectional dock. On 2 May the *Colonist* began questioning the provincial government’s motives, and by 15 July was heartily condemning the Premier and Cabinet, and dismissing the government’s plan as a sham designed to buy more time.¹⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, on 16 July the *Standard*, still under the proprietorship of De Cosmos, printed copies of correspondence between the member for Esquimalt and late Provincial Secretary, A. Roche Robertson, and Premier De Cosmos. These letters were exhibited as proof that negotiations between the federal and provincial governments were ongoing, and that positive action *was* being taken.¹⁴⁷

Despite this, the pages of the *Colonist* for the balance of 1873 were filled with accusations, claims and counter-claims. The provincial government continued to blame the Dominion government for the delay, and pleaded with its constituents for more time. The belief in some quarters, including those of John Robson, A. Roche Robertson, J. F. McCreight and J. S. Helmcken, was that many of the Premier’s claims were false. His ‘First Dry Dock Scheme,’ they concluded, had clearly failed, and

¹⁴⁶ “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 27 February 1873, p. 1; “The Graving Dock at Esquimalt,” *Colonist*, 14 March 1873, p. 2; “Floating or Sectional Dock at Esquimalt,” *Colonist*, 16 April 1873, p. 2; “The Dry Dock,” *Colonist*, 2 May 1873, p. 1; and “The Graving Dock Sham,” *Colonist*, 15 July 1873, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ “The Esquimalt Graving Dock,” *Standard*, 16 July 1873, p. 3.

attacks upon him and his administration were re-doubled both in the legislature and in public.¹⁴⁸

Subsequent events would show that their conclusions were only partly correct. By mid-1873, the Premier knew that the Dominion government would neither alter the Terms of Union respecting the drydock, nor undertake the work themselves. They would, however, agree to pay the province a lump sum of £50,000 in lieu of the guarantee.¹⁴⁹ This meant that the third part of the 'First Dry Dock Scheme' had actually been successful. The problem was that the provincial government still did not have the necessary funds to carry out the work on its own. Therefore, late in 1873, De Cosmos traveled to England to undertake discussions with representatives of the Imperial government aimed at securing more money for the project. On 6 December, he wrote to the Secretary of the Admiralty and laid out his proposition: Either the provincial government would undertake the work, and give the warships of the Royal Navy preferential access to the dock for fifteen years in exchange for a £50,000 contribution from London; or, the dock could be undertaken as an Imperial Work, in which case British Columbia would contribute the Dominion government's £50,000 to the Imperial effort. In either case, construction was to commence in 1874 and be completed within three years.¹⁵⁰ This plan, although not completely original, became known as the "Second Dry Dock Scheme."

No decision had been arrived at by the Imperial government by the time De Cosmos left London on 13 December, so he requested that the provincial government

¹⁴⁸ "The Dry-Dock," *Colonist*, 14 December 1873, p. 2; "The Graving Dock," *Colonist*, 23 December 1873, p. 1; "The Graving Dock," *Colonist*, 28 December 1873, p. 2; and "The Two Schemes," *Colonist*, 30 December 1873, p. 2.

be informed by telegram of the decision as soon as possible.¹⁵¹ Back in Victoria, the pressure of public opinion had been rising, and a few days before Christmas the provincial government announced what most observers had predicted as far back as the previous February – that the ‘First Dry Dock Scheme’ had effectively failed.¹⁵² This admission caused yet more accusations and recriminations in the provincial legislature, which did not abate until De Cosmos returned from England in late January 1874. In his report to the legislature on the results of his mission, he outlined his activities and entered copies of his correspondence into the record. The final piece of this correspondence was a telegram from Gilbert M. Sproat, British Columbia’s Agent-General in London, which advised that the Imperial government’s decision would be delayed by the dissolution of the British Parliament.¹⁵³

Meanwhile in London, the Admiralty had informed the Colonial Office that it wholeheartedly approved of the project, because: “The construction of a Dry Dock at Esquimalt of sufficient dimensions to take in large ships of war would tend to remove the objections which now exist to the employment of iron-built ships on the Pacific Station and would thus be of very great service in time of peace as well as war.” They believed, however, that a contribution of £30,000, rather than £50,000, would be most appropriate. Most importantly, they stipulated that the funds should not be transferred to the province until the dock opened, as a means of guaranteeing its completion.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 23 December 1873, p. 1; and “The Dry Dock Scheme,” *Standard*, 27 December 1873, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Amor De Cosmos to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 6 December 1873, Pacific Station Records.

¹⁵¹ Amor De Cosmos to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 December 1873, Pacific Station Records.

¹⁵² “The Graving Dock,” *Colonist*, 23 December 1873, p. 1.

¹⁵³ “Blasted Hopes!” *Colonist*, 4 February 1874, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ Admiralty to Colonial Office, 17 January 1874, Pacific Station Records.

The Colonial Secretary concurred with the Admiralty's conclusions, and forwarded the recommendations to the Treasury for approval.¹⁵⁵

Before the Treasury could approve the Imperial contribution, the British Parliament was dissolved. Thus, not until 16 April 1874 did the Admiralty inform the Colonial Office that the contribution of £30,000 had been approved by the Treasury, contingent upon the terms described above.¹⁵⁶ The British Columbia government, however, was not informed that any money was forthcoming until it received a telegram from Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, on 29 April, nearly two weeks after the decision had been made. They were not informed of the Imperial government's complete terms until a full dispatch arrived in Victoria via the Governor-General in mid-June.¹⁵⁷

Back in Victoria, the period between De Cosmos' return from England and the arrival of the telegram from London was turbulent, to say the least. It had begun with the now-familiar accusations and counter-claims both inside the legislature and outside. On the evening of 7 February, the Premier planned to introduce a Bill to approve the extension of the length of time allowed for the Dominion government to complete the transcontinental railway, and to accept the £50,000 in lieu of the guarantee of Section XII of the Terms of Union.

Many opponents of De Cosmos' plans, including Senator Macdonald and Dr. Helmcken, believed (falsely, as it later turned out) that the Railway time-limit extension was the political price that De Cosmos had been forced to pay for the £50,000. A public meeting was held in the early evening of 7 February, with over 800 persons

¹⁵⁵ Colonial Office to Admiralty, 27 January 1874, Pacific Station Records.

¹⁵⁶ Admiralty to Colonial Office, 16 April 1874, Pacific Station Records.

attending, at which a resolution was passed demanding that the provincial government refrain from passing any legislation on the matter until the full intentions of the Mackenzie administration were made clear.¹⁵⁸ The situation worsened, however, when the people were informed that several government officials, the Premier included, were involved in mineral and land speculation on Texada Island.¹⁵⁹ Worse still, it became known that while in London to petition the Imperial government about the drydock, De Cosmos had sold shares in the Texada venture to English capitalists.¹⁶⁰ The people were incensed, and went to the legislature *en masse* to express their displeasure. When they arrived, they disrupted the legislative proceedings to such a degree that the police had to be summoned. A scuffle ensued between the police and the occupants of the gallery, who overflowed onto the floor of the House when a second large body of demonstrators reached the building and attacked the main entrance. Most of the members had left the floor by this time, and the Premier had fled into the Speaker's chambers. At this point, prominent members of the Opposition were able to calm the crowd, and convinced them to leave the legislature peacefully, albeit singing "We'll hang De Cosmos to a sour apple tree" repeatedly to the tune of "Yankee Doodle."¹⁶¹

Within days of this demonstration, De Cosmos resigned as Premier and left the city. Fortunately for him, at that time there was no law against dual representation, and he went directly to Ottawa to take up the seat in the House of Commons that he had

¹⁵⁷ Canada. House of Commons. Sessional Papers, 1875, No. 64.

¹⁵⁸ Howay, British Columbia, pp. 355-356.

¹⁵⁹ Contemporary spelling was "Taxhada," but to avoid confusion the modern spelling is used.

¹⁶⁰ "The Taxhada Island Ore Grab – Local Government Deeply Involved!" Colonist, 8 February 1874, p. 1; and "First Provincial Legislative Assembly, Third Session," Colonist, 8 February 1874, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ "Immense Popular Demonstration – The Ministry Condemned!" Colonist, 8 February 1874, p. 3; and Margaret A. Ormsby, British Columbia: A History. (Vancouver: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 262-263.

held since 1871.¹⁶² This turn of events meant that any action on the drydock would have to wait for the formation of a new government, and the negotiation of yet another agreement with Ottawa regarding the payment in lieu of the Section XII guarantee. By the end of February, Attorney-General Walkem had been sworn in as the new Premier, and set about trying to salvage the situation.

The Imperial government's agreement to contribute £30,000, although less than was hoped for, must have seemed like a very positive development when it arrived at the end of April. Unfortunately for Walkem, any sense of accomplishment could not have lasted long, for by mid-June the 'Second Dry Dock Scheme' had fallen apart just as completely as the First. On 10 June the *Colonist* printed a portion of a Bill introduced in Ottawa by Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie, which provided for the £50,000 in lieu in the Section XII guarantee. The De Cosmos and Walkem governments had called it a gift, while the Opposition had called it a bribe. It turned out to be neither – nothing more than a *loan* at five per cent interest.¹⁶³

This new problem was somewhat unexpected, but had resulted from the fact that the original agreement for £50,000 in lieu of the Section XII guarantee had been made between De Cosmos and the Conservative administration of Sir John A. Macdonald. Unfortunately, Macdonald had been forced to resign on 5 November 1873 over the Pacific Scandal, and the new Liberal administration under Mackenzie disputed that the £50,000 had been meant as a gift. Clearly, this threw the entire project into question once again. A loan from the Dominion to the provincial government was worse than

¹⁶² Howay, *British Columbia*, pp. 333-336; It should be noted that laws against dual representation were passed by both the Dominion and British Columbia governments as a result of De Cosmos' action.

¹⁶³ "Graving Dock Bill," *Colonist*, 10 June 1874, p. 3; and "The Dry Dock Sham," *Colonist*, 13 June 1874, p. 1.

the original terms of Section XII, because it implied that British Columbia would eventually have to pay it back. And for a government with limited powers of taxation, paying back a somewhat substantial loan was not something to be considered lightly. Either way, to avoid the appearance of more delay, Premier Walkem arranged for a British engineer to inspect sites in Esquimalt and make plans and recommendations to the government. He also ordered fifty tons of cement, to be used in the dock's construction.¹⁶⁴

This bad feeling was exacerbated by the fact that continuing delays in the construction of the C.P.R. had already created hostility between Walkem and the Mackenzie government in Ottawa. In fact, the railway question had created so much hostility that the possibility of secession was openly and seriously discussed in Victoria.¹⁶⁵ In February 1874 the Dominion government sent J. D. Edgar to discuss the outstanding railway issues with Walkem's government. Although Edgar had received no instructions regarding the drydock, Walkem wanted it to be included in any deal. But since Edgar had no authority to negotiate a binding agreement on either the railway *or* the drydock, little was accomplished and the two sides became even more bitter and distrustful of one another.¹⁶⁶ In the Summer of 1874 the Imperial government intervened in the person of Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary. His mediation produced what were called the "Carnarvon Terms," which were meant to settle the outstanding issues but which ended up being yet another point of contention for the next several years.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ "Fifty Tons of Cement," *Colonist*, 9 September 1874, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ Ormsby, *British Columbia*, pp. 266-267.

¹⁶⁶ Howay, *British Columbia*, pp. 357-360.

¹⁶⁷ Ormsby, *British Columbia*, pp. 267-268.

When the drydock engineer, William Morris of the Greenock firm Kinipple & Morris, arrived in October 1874, he at once visited Esquimalt to begin his assessment. Once completed, his plans and specifications were to be sent back to Britain, so that country's great dock-building companies could accurately and competitively bid on the contract to build the work.¹⁶⁸ The details of Mr. Morris' work, and the timeframe in which it was accomplished, do not survive in the historical record. What is known is that debate on the issue died down completely until the Spring of 1875, when the provincial government introduced the "Graving Dock Bill," to enable it to accept advances from Ottawa as work on the graving dock progressed.¹⁶⁹

Debate on this Bill focussed less upon its object, the construction of the dock, than it did upon the terms of the contributions made by the Canadian and Imperial governments. Premier Walkem had gone to London in the Autumn of 1874, with one of his objects being to obtain more monetary support for the dock from the Imperial government. When the gravity of British Columbia's financial situation was fully explained to them, the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty agreed to increase their support to £50,000, but only if the original terms regarding the Admiralty's privileges and the timetable for payment remained the same.¹⁷⁰

Respecting the money from the Dominion government, as noted above, the uncertainty hinged upon whether the amount in lieu of the guarantee was a loan or a gift. During the Autumn of 1874, the Dominion government passed "an Act to authorize the advance of a certain sum to the province of British Columbia, for the

¹⁶⁸ "The Dry Dock," Colonist, 2 October 1874, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ "First Provincial Legislative Assembly – Fourth Session," Colonist, 2 April 1875, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Margaret A. Ormsby, "The Relations Between British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada, 1871-1885." (Bryn Mawr, PA: PhD Dissertation, 1937), p. 226; "The Graving Dock." Colonist, 19 March

construction of a Graving Dock at Esquimalt, and for other purposes.”¹⁷¹ British Columbia still believed this money was a gift, while the Mackenzie government still contended that it was a loan. The bitterness of this disagreement and the refusal of either side to budge may have had much to do with the critical financial situation of both governments. With crops failing, a depression spreading across the country, and the transcontinental railway already causing friction with Victoria, the Dominion government was more than a little reluctant to give British Columbia \$250,000 more. The province, on the other hand, had already spent huge sums on local improvements and had now publicly committed itself to build the drydock on its own account as well.¹⁷²

Amor De Cosmos, having been surprisingly re-elected in the federal election of 1874, spent much of the next four years taking the Mackenzie government to task on this issue.¹⁷³ In the Spring of 1875, he introduced evidence in the form of letters and telegrams from Macdonald’s former Ministers of Public Works and Finance, Hector Langevin and S. L. Tilley, respectively, that it had been the intention of the late government to advance the £50,000 as *gift* and not as a loan, but to no avail.¹⁷⁴ As a result of the Mackenzie government’s refusal to submit the matter to binding arbitration, it continued to cause friction between the two governments. In November 1877 the Governor-General, Lord Dufferin, attempted to remedy the situation by

1875, p. 1; “First Provincial Legislative Assembly – Fourth Session,” *Colonist*, 2 April 1875, p. 2; and British Columbia. *Report of Executive Council Committee – 31 January 1877*, Pacific Station Records.

¹⁷¹ Canada. House of Commons. *Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada*, 1875, p. 141; and Commons, *Sessional Papers*, 1875, No. 64.

¹⁷² Ormsby, “Relations,” pp. 225-226.

¹⁷³ Commons, *Debates*, 1875, pp. 141 and 708; 1877, p. 837; and 1878, pp. 410-416.

¹⁷⁴ Commons, *Sessional Papers*, 1875, No. 64; British Columbia. *Report of Executive Council Committee – 31 January 1877*, Pacific Station Records; and “The Dry-Dock Correspondence – The Government Fully Exonerated!” *Colonist*, 21 March 1877, p. 3.

writing to Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary. In his letters, Dufferin made clear his support for Mackenzie's position and stated that "[n]o assertion either of Walkem's or of De Cosmos' can be at all trusted, as they are both notorious for their untruthfulness. I should scarcely be inclined to give much weight even to Tilley's." He believed that there was little chance of a settlement on the issue without direct intervention from London. Accordingly, Dufferin suggested that, given Victoria's importance as an Imperial naval station, the Home government consider making an additional investment in the dock itself, thereby removing the necessity of a federal contribution altogether.¹⁷⁵ The response of Lord Carnarvon and the British government to this suggestion is not known, but no further money was offered.

Expecting that the disagreement over money with Ottawa would be quickly resolved, the Walkem government had issued a call for tenders on 15 May 1875 for the construction of the cofferdam within which the dock would eventually be constructed.¹⁷⁶ When tenders closed the following August, seven had been received. They ranged in amount from a low of \$22,170 to a high of \$138,904. The contract was awarded to the firm of Hayward & Jenkinson of Victoria, for the amount of \$59,479.

No contract was signed with that firm until 20 September, however, due primarily to the continuing conflict with the Dominion government, which had now resulted in the provincial government's drafts being refused by Ottawa. With its ability to impose taxes limited, most of the province's operating budget came via the federal treasury in the form of subsidies. If Ottawa refused to honour British Columbia's drafts, then the province could not pay its existing creditors, let alone sign agreements

¹⁷⁵ C. W. de Kiewiet and F. H. Underhill, eds., Dufferin-Carnarvon Correspondence, 1874-1878. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1955), pp. 382-383.

with new ones. Further delay was experienced as a result of the “unavailability” of one of the partners of Hayward & Jenkinson to sign the contract.¹⁷⁷ Even after the contract was signed, however, nothing more was done. This uncertain state of affairs continued until mid-December 1875, when it was revealed that Messrs Hayward and Jenkinson had been allowed to *sell* their successful tender to one of the other bidders, Reed Brothers & Company, of London. This arrangement was considered highly irregular, and elicited a great deal of comment. The greatest fear seems to have been that the entire process had been infected by corruption, and that the contractors were being paid by the government for doing nothing.¹⁷⁸

The events surrounding those revelations became known as the “Cofferdam Scandal,” which had the cumulative effect, firstly, of causing still more delay to the commencement of the project; and secondly, of instigating a comprehensive review of the provincial government’s dealings in the matter. This review revealed some interesting and suspicious facts, first among which was that the government had not even made an attempt to investigate the \$22,170 tender to see if it was viable. Equally suspicious was the fact that there was only a \$232 difference between the tender of Hayward & Jenkinson and that of Reed Brothers. This raised the question of whether or not someone in the Lands & Works Office, which had received the Reed Brothers proposal two weeks before the closing date, had provided its details to Hayward & Jenkinson. The most damning fact for many people, however, was that although many months had passed between the signing of the contract and its being sold to Reed

¹⁷⁶ “Coffer Dam,” *Colonist*, 15 May 1875, p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ “Fighting Mackenzie,” *Colonist*, 16 October 1875, p. 1; “The Supplies Stopped,” *Colonist*, 17 October 1875, p. 1; and “The Coffer Dam Contract Not Yet Signed,” *Colonist*, 7 September 1875, p. 1.

Brothers, the government had done nothing to enforce the terms of the contract, which required the cofferdam to be completed within four months of the signing date.¹⁷⁹

In the end, the matter was settled by the electors of the province, who were most concerned about Walkem's borrowing of large sums from the Dominion government. Surprisingly, the Cofferdam Scandal seems only to have been a serious election issue to the *Colonist*. Little mention was made of it in either the *Mainland Guardian* or the *Nanaimo Free Press*, and unfortunately no copies of the *Standard*, the *Dominion Pacific Herald* or the *British Columbian* are available for this period.¹⁸⁰ It is likely, however, given the political bias of the newspapers in this period, that either the *Herald* or the *British Columbian* would have echoed the *Colonist's* line. Regardless, in the election of February 1876 A. C. Elliot was elected to replace Walkem.¹⁸¹

For almost five years the efforts of the provincial government had been foiled by a combination of conflict with the Dominion government, scandal within the provincial government, and the jobbery of contractors. After all that time, ground had not even been broken on the project. Clearly a fresh approach was needed, and the citizens of British Columbia looked to Elliot to provide it.

¹⁷⁸ British Columbia. Legislative Assembly, "Report of Public Works." in *Sessional Papers*, 1875, pp. 426-427; and "The Cofferdam Contract – Four and a Half Months of Mysterious Delay Explained!" *Colonist*, 18 December 1875, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ "The Cofferdam Indictment," *Colonist*, 22 January 1876, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Editorial Commentaries in the *Mainland Guardian* and the *Nanaimo Free Press*, 15 Dec 1875 – 28 February 1876.

¹⁸¹ Ormsby, *British Columbia*, p. 271.

Chapter IV

The Final Failure of Provincial Efforts and the Dominion Government's Settlement Act

Soon after taking office, Elliot's government sought to set things straight and restore the public's confidence. It prevailed upon Messrs Hayward and Jenkinson to surrender their contract, and then awarded it to Reed Brothers and Company in their own right.¹⁸² As it turned out, the Elliott Administration managed to accomplish in less than a week what the previous government had struggled with for more than six months. On 21 March 1876, Reed Brothers were officially placed in possession of Thetis Cove, the future site of the drydock, and within two weeks preparations were being made for the commencement of the actual work.¹⁸³ By mid-May a contract had been let to James Watt & Company of Birmingham for the construction of a pumping engine, and six hundred tons of cement had been delivered to Esquimalt warehouses.¹⁸⁴ By mid-July, after another short delay occasioned by the continuing dispute over money between the Dominion and provincial governments, work finally began.¹⁸⁵

After some preliminary digging and construction on shore, a great occasion was made of the driving of the first pile in the water by His Excellency Lord Dufferin, the Governor-General, on 19 September 1876.¹⁸⁶ Work progressed at a slow but constant pace on the cofferdam through the summer of 1877, when the government took pause to catch its breath in the ongoing subsidy battle with Ottawa. By then, it had become

¹⁸² "The Cofferdam," *Colonist*, 19 March 1876, p. 1.

¹⁸³ "The Cofferdam – The Ceremony of Giving Possession," *Colonist*, 22 March 1876, p. 2; and "The Dock and Cofferdam," *Colonist*, 30 March 1876, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ "The Dry Dock – The Duty of the House," *Colonist*, 14 May 1876, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ "The Cofferdam," *Colonist*, 15 July 1876, p. 3; and "The Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 10 August 1876, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ "The Esquimalt Graving Dock – Driving of the Initial Pile," *Colonist*, 20 September 1876, p. 3.

clear that the project could not be completed without money in the form of a *gift* from Ottawa or some other source. As nothing of the sort appeared forthcoming, the provincial government decided to explore other options.¹⁸⁷

The first option which was seriously considered was the total abandonment of the project. British Columbia believed that it was being asked to put out rather substantial amounts of money for a project which could be most properly described as being of a *National* or *Imperial* character. The only assistance it was receiving was £50,000 from London upon the dock's completion, and the disputed loan/gift of another £50,000 from Ottawa. As the estimated cost of the whole project was, even in 1877, in excess of £200,000, Elliot's hesitancy is easily understood. Figure 1, which shows that the B.C. government was running substantial deficits even *before* anything was charged to the drydock account, also demonstrates that if Elliot were not careful, the drydock could bankrupt the province. This remained the government's fall-back position for quite some time.

Figure 1 – Comparison of B.C. Government Revenue and Expenditure, 1872-1878¹⁸⁸

Year	1872	1873	1874	1875	1876	1877	1878
Prov. Revenue	114,160.46	157,614.92	147,889.81	138,719.07	177,415.68	204,015.67	272,418.44
Federal Subsidy	214,000.00	222,147.22	229,977.69	564,179.09	209,896.72	208,093.56	208,093.56
Loans	0.00	0.00	189,150.00	58,000.00	118,850.00	752,000.00	0.00
Total Revenue	328,160.46	379,762.14	567,017.50	760,898.16	506,162.40	1,164,109.37	480,512.00
Expenditure (Drydock Acct.)	432,082.71 (0.00)	380,918.62 (0.00)	584,281.57 (0.00)	829,276.54 (0.00)	796,709.96 (106,532.68)	698,344.74 (40,142.44)	518,970.18 (18,871.21)
Surplus (Deficit)	(103,922.25)	(1,156.48)	(17,264.07)	(68,378.38)	(290,547.56)	465,764.67	(38,458.18)

The province ultimately asked the Imperial government for more assistance. Accordingly, through the late summer and autumn of 1877, it made strenuous efforts to induce the Imperial government to loosen its purse strings to ensure the completion of

¹⁸⁷ "The Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 14 June 1877, p. 1.

the work. In requesting the assistance of Rear-Admiral De Horsey, then Commander-in-Chief at Esquimalt, the Lieutenant-Governor explained that: “The financial resources of the province are not such as to enable the government to prosecute the work to completion unaided by Canada, and without further assistance than is already promised by England.” He added that the sums already spent on the cofferdam and pumping machinery alone would barely be covered by the £50,000 then promised, and hinted that the province was still considering abandoning the project.¹⁸⁹

De Horsey, as might be expected, supported the province’s views, but suggested a third option. He asked whether or not the province would be willing to “donate” the work, equipment and machinery which had already been completed or delivered, if the Admiralty took over responsibility for the work in its entirety.¹⁹⁰ Within the week, the government replied in no uncertain terms that it *would* be willing to give the then-completed plant and equipment to the Admiralty as a gift on the condition that merchant vessels could dock there, but that that would not be their first preference. They then laid out the three conditions which the Imperial government would have to meet to induce the province to complete the dock on its own account, rather than as an Imperial work. They were: first, that the Imperial government contribute £100,000 instead of £50,000. Second, that payments take place as the work progressed, rather than as a lump sum upon its completion. And third, that the Admiralty alter the existing

¹⁸⁸ Data taken from “Table 1: Comparative Statement of the Receipts and Expenditures of the Province of British Columbia.” in British Columbia. Public Accounts for the Year Ended 30th June 1894. (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1894), p. 16.

¹⁸⁹ Lieutenant-Governor A. M. Richards to RAdm A. F. R. De Horsey, 26 September 1877, Pacific Station Records.

¹⁹⁰ RAdm A. F. R. De Horsey to Lieutenant-Governor A. M. Richards, 1 October 1877, Pacific Station Records.

terms under which Her Majesty's Ships were to be docked, so the province could realize a small return on the docking of warships as well as merchant ships.¹⁹¹

Armed with this information, De Horsey dispatched a long letter to the Secretary of the Admiralty, explaining the situation and giving his recommendations. It was, he said, an "Imperial necessity" that a dock be constructed at Esquimalt in order to alleviate his Station's reliance on "Foreign Nations." Accordingly, he recommended that although either option would achieve the object of completing the dock, his preference would be for the Admiralty to acquire the work and complete it themselves. He also attempted to make it clear to his superiors in London that in his opinion the Dominion government, not the province, was most to blame for the unfortunate situation.¹⁹²

Meanwhile, work on the cofferdam continued to progress, albeit much more slowly than had been originally thought. What had been expected to be completed in four months had now drawn itself out over two years and counting. That was nothing, though, compared to the ongoing bickering between the province and the Dominion over the gift/loan, and within the province over a number of issues. The ex-Premier, Amor De Cosmos, was still a Member of Parliament in Ottawa. On 21 February 1878, he delivered what should have been a death blow to the Mackenzie government's argument, when he produced a telegram sent to him as Premier of British Columbia by Prime Minister Mackenzie in 1874. The telegram read: "Government offer is to pay two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, as dock work progresses, in lieu of guarantee

¹⁹¹ Lieutenant-Governor A. M. Richards to RAdm A. F. R. De Horsey, 8 October 1877, Pacific Station Records.

¹⁹² RAdm A. F. R. De Horsey to Secretary of the Admiralty, 9 October 1877, Pacific Station Records.

provided by Terms of Union.”¹⁹³ Despite this convincing evidence supporting the province’s case, the Dominion government refused to budge on the issue.

Back in Victoria, conflict was brewing on at least two fronts. First, many people were angry at the prospect of the cofferdam contractors using Chinese labourers.¹⁹⁴ This was quickly defused, however, when the site engineer publicly promised to use only white labour. The second issue was more contentious, as it revolved around the amount of money which had been paid for the land upon which the dock was to be built. It seems that the then-exorbitant sum of \$16,500 had been paid to Messrs Tolmie and Finlayson for the property, following a judgement by an arbitrator. The Opposition felt that the land was only worth \$600, and demanded an investigation into both the amount and the mode of the payment, which had been through the Premier’s Office rather than through the Finance Department. Their demands were not met, however, as a Select Committee had already reported on the issue in 1876 and again in 1877. Furthermore, on both of these occasions, both the claims of Messrs Finlayson and Tolmie and the arbitrator’s findings, which were in their favour, had been entered into the record.¹⁹⁵

After this debate there was silence on the issue of the drydock until early October 1878, when the government ordered all work on the cofferdam to cease. No explanation was given, and this report was followed by another long period of

¹⁹³ Amor De Cosmos, Speeches of Mr. De Cosmos on the Esquimalt Graving Dock and Canadian Pacific Railway, and Alaska Boundary Line. (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1878), pp. 6-7.

¹⁹⁴ “Cofferdam,” Colonist, 15 February 1878, p. 3.

¹⁹⁵ British Columbia. Legislative Assembly, Sessional Papers, 1876, pp. 731-732; British Columbia. Legislative Assembly, Sessional Papers, 1877, pp. 449-473; “The Dry Dock Award Once More,” Colonist, 27 February 1878, p. 1; “Second Provincial Legislature – Third Session,” Colonist, 7 March 1878, p. 2; “The Purchase of the Thetis Cove Property – Extraordinary Disclosures,” Colonist, 8 March 1878, p. 2; and “The Latest Misrepresentation,” Colonist, 10 March 1878, p. 2.

silence.¹⁹⁶ Not until March 1879 was it reported that some of the cofferdam's piles were rotten and were threatening the work's successful completion. At the same time the provincial government had become embroiled in a law suit over the matter, with the government blaming the resident engineer for the situation, and the contractor blaming the government.¹⁹⁷ The final disposition of this lawsuit is not clear, but it was likely settled out of court.

By April 1879 Sir John A. Macdonald had been back in power in Ottawa for several months, and it was expected in Victoria that the long-promised £50,000 would soon be forthcoming from the Dominion in the form of a gift.¹⁹⁸ This was even more likely since George Walkem had also been returned to power as Premier of British Columbia, and there had long been co-operative, if not completely friendly, relations between the two. The expectation that the conflict over the loan/gift would quickly be resolved by Macdonald's return proved correct, and arrangements were made for the provincial government to begin drawing from those funds. The timing of these events was particularly fortuitous because in June 1879 the Imperial government finally rejected De Horsey's proposal of October 1877, that the Admiralty take possession of the site and materials for the dock and complete the work itself, and reiterated its commitment of £50,000 in support of the work.¹⁹⁹

Within days of the arrival of the Imperial government's decision, the provincial government formally re-possessed the site from Reed Brothers and invited new

¹⁹⁶ "Work on the Cofferdam Stopped," *Colonist*, 9 October 1878, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ "Third Provincial Assembly – Second Session," *Colonist*, 28 March 1879, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ "Third Provincial Assembly – Second Session," *Colonist*, 29 March 1879, p. 3.

¹⁹⁹ "The Drydock," *Colonist*, 27 June 1879, p. 1.

proposals from companies interested in completing the work.²⁰⁰ Meanwhile, the government decided that to avoid further deterioration of the existing work, it would continue building the cofferdam by day labour, under the supervision of the Government Engineer, until a new contractor was found. In the end, no suitable company was located, and the cofferdam was completed by day labour. Pumping out commenced on 1 October 1879.²⁰¹

While this was going on, the province issued a call for tenders on 6 September 1879 for the construction of the drydock itself. With the unencumbered support of the Dominion government it seemed likely that, once a contract was signed, work would proceed smoothly and the dock would soon be completed. Several local firms, as well as a number of Eastern Canadian and British firms and one American firm, submitted bids. By late January 1880, all of the local bidders had had their deposits returned to them without explanation, suggesting that something may again have gone wrong with the financing arrangements. However, it was soon announced that McNamee & Company of Montréal had been awarded the contract. This quickly became something of a *cause célèbre* to many in Victoria, particularly to those firms who felt that the contract should have gone to a local company. This feeling gained momentum when it was noted that McNamee & Company had no previous experience in building drydocks, and that their earlier tender to build a drydock at Québec had been set aside for that very reason.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ "Taking Possession of the Cofferdam," *Colonist*, 29 June 1879, p. 1.

²⁰¹ "The Esquimalt Cofferdam," *Colonist*, 17 July 1879, p. 3; and "The Esquimalt Cofferdam," *Colonist*, 2 October 1879, p. 3.

²⁰² "Esquimalt Dry Dock," *Colonist*, 28 December 1879, p. 2; "The Dry Dock Tenders – Extraordinary Action of the Government," *Colonist*, 21 January 1880, p. 1; and "Who Are McNamee & Co.?" *Colonist*, 24 February 1880, p. 2.

Their protests fell upon deaf ears, however, and the following June it was reported that a deal had been signed. On 24 July 1880, Messrs F. B. McNamee and A. G. Nish arrived in Victoria to inspect the drydock site itself, and several quarries as far away as Nanaimo, from which their building materials would come. While in Esquimalt McNamee was pressed to declare whether or not he intended to use any Chinese labour in the dock's construction. His statement that he intended to use only local white labour was well-received, with those present giving him three cheers and singing 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow.'²⁰³

After a month of preliminary preparations, and the awarding of several sub-contracts to local suppliers of materials, work began in earnest. By early September the cofferdam, which had been re-flooded the previous Spring due to a large amount of fresh water collecting inside it, was again pumped dry, and construction of scaffolding and offices for the engineers was well underway.²⁰⁴

Construction proceeded slowly for the next nineteen months, until March 1882, when a committee of the provincial legislature reported on the work up to that date. Its findings were so shocking that they nearly brought down the government. Construction was far behind schedule and way over budget – an apparent repeat of the cofferdam fiasco. On 20 April, three week's after the committee's report, McNamee & Company ceased all work on the dock due to their men "refusing to turn to, on account of the non-payment of the wages due them."²⁰⁵

²⁰³ "The Drydock," *Colonist*, 25 July 1880, p. 3; "Esquimalt Drydock," *Colonist*, 27 July 1880, p. 3; and "Mr. F. B. McNamee, the Graving Dock Contractor, at Yale," *Colonist*, 29 August 1880, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ RAdm F. H. Stirling to Secretary of the Admiralty, 9 September 1880, Pacific Station Records; "The Drydock," *Colonist*, 29 August 1880, p. 3; and "The Drydock," *Colonist*, 4 September 1880, p. 3.

²⁰⁵ McNamee & Company to Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, 2 June 1882, Lands and Works Records, BC Archives.

In May 1882, George Walkem was elevated by Sir John A. Macdonald to a seat on the Supreme Court, and was replaced as Premier by Robert Beaven. In the provincial election the next month Beaven's party was defeated, but he remained Premier because Lieutenant-Governor Clement Cornwall believed that a new government could only be formed if the previous one either resigned or was defeated in the Legislature. And since Beaven refused to either resign or open the new session of the Legislature (which would inevitably mean his immediate defeat), he remained in power, hoping for some way to improve his situation. In addition to this, Amor De Cosmos lost his seat in the House of Commons in the federal election in July.²⁰⁶ The main issue in both of these elections had, predictably, been the continued delay in the completion of the C.P.R.. Despite the blow of losing two of its greatest proponents, and the political paralysis of a third, the B.C. government remained committed to the dock's eventual completion.

In a long report submitted to the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works on 2 June, McNamee & Company blamed the non-payment of their workers on the provincial government's failure to pay it promptly when it submitted a valid "Certificate of Work Completed." Furthermore, in reply to a Department of Lands and Works report tabled in the legislature in March, McNamee & Company argued that the plans provided by Kinipple & Morris were flawed, and had required extensive costly alterations. In addition, the quantities of clay and rock involved in the excavation greatly exceeded initial estimates, and the movement of "some 100,000 tons of material, bricks, sand, gravel, stone and lumber" had caused unexpected extra expense. There had also been serious delay in acquiring the first shipments of sandstone.

²⁰⁶ Howay, British Columbia, pp. 411-412; and Ormsby, British Columbia, pp. 284-285.

Furthermore, the quantity of cement required had been grossly under-estimated, and the quality of that available had been grossly over-estimated. The fact that two separate shipments of cement had been lost, one when the ship carrying it sank, and another when the ship had to jettison it off the coast of South America to save itself from the same fate, had only exacerbated the situation.²⁰⁷

Despite McNamee's protests, the provincial government took possession of the incomplete work on 27 June 1882, and continued it in the same fashion as the cofferdam, by day labour.²⁰⁸ In the meantime, the government sent a copy of McNamee's accusations to Kinipple & Morris in Greenock, for their response. The reply, authored by William Morris himself, dismissed the contractor's claims as spurious and asked why, if there had been so many problems, they had not complained earlier. In his conclusion, Morris wrote that the "object of the Contractor's letter now under consideration, appears to me an attempt to throw blame on everyone but themselves and to hide their failure in the carrying out of their Contract."²⁰⁹

Over the summer of 1882, McNamee & Company had also petitioned for the return of the existing works to their custody, as they felt that the government still owed them some \$20,000 for the work which had been completed. In considering this request, the government again asked Kinipple & Morris for their opinion. On 4 October 1882, Morris counseled the government not to agree to return the works, since by his calculations McNamee & Company owed the government \$39,000 in penalties for not meeting time limits. Ten days later he followed with another letter arguing that

²⁰⁷ McNamee & Company to Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, 2 June 1882, Lands and Works Records.

²⁰⁸ Longstaff, Esquimalt Naval Base, p. 38.

the government's best course of action would be simply to continue building the dock by day labour.²¹⁰ This exchange set the stage for legal battles which continued until 1888, when the Dominion government agreed to compensate McNamee & Company for their loss on condition that the settlement be used to pay the company's remaining creditors in British Columbia.²¹¹

As noted above, Premier Beaven had been trying to delay the opening of the new session of the legislature until after new tenders could be obtained for the completion of the drydock, which he perhaps thought would result in a reversal of his political fortunes. By January 1883, however, he could delay no more, and the legislature was called into session by Lieutenant-Governor Cornwall on the 25th of that month. Within days, Beaven's government was defeated on a motion of non-confidence arising from his delaying tactics and exacerbated by numerous defections to the opposition. On 29 January Beaven resigned, and was replaced as Premier by William Smithe, who promised to resolve the continuing uncertainty about the island railway and the drydock.²¹² Although the provincial government took Morris' advice and steadfastly continued work on the dock, the new Premier and Cabinet knew that it would be impossible for the province to bear the increased costs alone. Therefore, with Sir John A. Macdonald still in power, but no longer sitting as a member for Victoria, negotiations were begun with the Dominion government for a permanent solution. While few details of these negotiations survive either in the federal or provincial

²⁰⁹ William Morris to Robert Beaven, Premier & Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, 3 October 1882, Lands and Works Records.

²¹⁰ Morris to Beaven, 4 October 1882, BC Archives; and Morris to Beaven, 14 October 1882, Lands and Works Records.

²¹¹ Commons, *Debates*, 1888, pp. 1653-1654.

²¹² Howay, *British Columbia*, p. 411; and Ormsby, *British Columbia*, p. 290.

Sessional Papers, or in the papers of Macdonald himself, they resulted in the Settlement Act, one provision of which read:

That it is expedient to grant and to appropriate the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the purchase from the said Province of the dry dock at Esquimalt, and such further sum as may be required to repay the said Province the amounts expended by the Government thereof or remaining due at the passing of the Act authorizing this grant for work or material supplied by the said Government since the 27th day of June, 1882.²¹³

In other words, the Dominion government agreed not only to take over the dock, but also to pay \$250,000 to the province for it and assume all debts incurred by the provincial government since it was re-possessed from McNamee & Company. The Settlement Act's main purpose, however, was to resolve the ongoing and much more contentious federal-provincial conflict regarding the C.P.R.. As such, it also proposed the transfer of millions of acres of land along the mainland and island railway belts to provincial ownership. That all of this was good news for the provincial government goes without saying, and is amply demonstrated by the fact that the agreement was introduced and first read in the provincial legislature on 7 May 1883, passed second reading on 9 May, passed third reading on 10 May, and received Royal Assent at the provincial level on 12 May.²¹⁴

Accordingly, in expectation of the Bill being passed at the federal level as well, the province transferred the dock site and all the machinery and supplies associated with it to the Dominion government on 24 August 1883. It is not clear if the Dominion government continued with the province's policy of using day labour, but upon gaining

²¹³ Canada, *Statutes of Canada*, 47 Victoria (1884), Chapter 6; and Commons, *Debates*, 1885, p. 67.

²¹⁴ Howay, *British Columbia*, pp. 412-413.

possession the Department of Public Works almost immediately advertised for tenders to complete the dock.²¹⁵

The party which was most displeased with this transaction was McNamee & Company, which was still trying to get its money from the province, and accused the federal government of purchasing stolen property.²¹⁶ It was not the only displeased party. Since the Bill did not expressly guarantee the *completion* of the dock, the *Mainland Guardian* predicted the abandonment of the project, and argued that “the Dominion Government [was] not so foolish as to lay out another dollar upon it.”²¹⁷ The *Nanaimo Free Press* echoed these sentiments, dismissing the Settlement Bill as an attempt to bribe British Columbia into relaxing the Terms of Union respecting the railway. The *Free Press* was more concerned at that time, however, with the Wellington coal strike and the use of Chinese labour in the mines than they were about either the drydock or the railway.²¹⁸ Although no copies of the *Standard* have survived from this period, comments in other newspapers indicate that it, too, opposed the Bill on the grounds that it surely meant the end of the drydock project.²¹⁹ The *Colonist* took the opposite position, and attacked ex-Premier Beaven for opposing the legislation. It also predicted that Beaven’s few supporters in the legislature would desert him when they saw just how beneficial the terms of the Settlement Bill were, and that his

²¹⁵ “Esquimalt Graving Dock, British Columbia,” *New Westminster British Columbian*, 8 December 1883, p. 2. Editorial commentary in the newspapers tends to suggest that tenders were called for by the Dominion Government as early as September or October 1883, but this is the earliest example the author was able to locate in a B.C. paper.

²¹⁶ William Bennett, *The Esquimalt Graving Dock Works, British Columbia*. (n.p.: Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, 1888[?]), p. 2. (National Library of Canada)

²¹⁷ “The Settlement Bill,” *Mainland Guardian*, 31 October 1883, p. 2.

²¹⁸ “Public Meeting – The Settlement Act Denounced,” *Nanaimo Free Press*, 24 October 1883, p. 3.

²¹⁹ “That Dock Refund,” *British Columbian*, 27 October 1883, p. 1.

constituents would soon demand his resignation over the issue.²²⁰ The *Colonist* was joined in supporting the Bill by the *British Columbian*, which argued that the Dominion government's motives had been placed beyond question by the fact that the federal Department of Public Works had taken possession of the dock site and issued a call for tenders for its completion. Moreover, the Dominion government had also begun reimbursing the provincial treasury for the sum already spent, and all before the Settlement Bill had even become law. Antagonism towards the Bill, they said, had as its source the jealousy of the Opposition and their desire to embarrass the government.²²¹ In the end, the *British Columbian* predicted, efforts to defeat the Bill would fail, since they had "not found anyone free of party prejudice who oppose[d]" it.²²²

Despite the prognostications of the *Guardian* and others, a tender was finally accepted from Messrs Larkin, Connolly & Company, of St. Catherines, Ontario, in November 1884.²²³ The reason for such a long delay between the call for tenders and the awarding of one is not clear, but since the Settlement Act did not officially become law until April 1884, it likely related to the necessity for Parliament to approve everything before any money could legally be expended. Regardless of the reasoning, by the Spring of 1886 the dock was well on its way to completion. The government of British Columbia had been paid all that was due, and the Dominion government had come to an agreement with the Imperial government regarding London's long-intended

²²⁰ "The Settlement Bill – Probable Deposition of the Leader of the Opposition," *Colonist*, 28 October 1883, p. 2; and "Mr. Beaven's Retirement," *Colonist*, 30 October 1883, p. 2.

²²¹ "That Dock Refund," *British Columbian*, 27 October 1883, p. 1; "The Standard is Dumb," *British Columbian*, 3 November 1883, p. 2; "Needed Legislation," *British Columbian*, 10 November 1883, p. 2; "More of the Settlement," *British Columbian*, 14 November 1883, p. 2; and Untitled Report, *British Columbian*, 17 November 1883, p. 2.

²²² "Off the Track Again," *British Columbian*, 1 December 1883, p. 2.

contribution to the dock's construction. It would remain at £50,000, in exchange for which the Dominion government would grant the Royal Navy the right to dock its ships in the Esquimalt dock, on a cost-recovery basis, for a period of fifteen years from the completion of the work.²²⁴

From this point on, work continued steadily until the dock's completion in June 1887. The only real problem, in retrospect, seems quite silly. Having taken into its possession and completed a first-class graving dock, the Dominion government found that it had no personnel in British Columbia who were qualified to operate it. This problem was overcome easily, however, with the Royal Navy providing qualified personnel and accepting responsibility for safety until the Dominion government obtained a qualified Dockmaster.²²⁵

And so, at three o'clock on the afternoon of Wednesday, 20 July 1887, nearly twenty-seven years after it had first been proposed, sixteen years to the day after British Columbia had entered Confederation, and two years *after* the completion of the trans-continental railway, the dock was officially opened. With HMS *Triumph's* band playing gaily in the background, a large blue ribbon was cut, and the pumping machinery was started. In total, the dock and associated works had cost the staggering sum of \$1,171,664.74. It had contributed to the fall of two governments, it had ruined

²²³ Bennett, The Esquimalt Graving Dock Works, p. 2.

²²⁴ Agreement Between the Admiralty and the Government of the Dominion of Canada Respecting the Esquimalt Graving Dock, dated 18 February 1886 and signed by Hector G. Langevin, Minister of Public Works of Canada, and Vice-Admiral Sir Anthony Hoskins, representing the Commissioners for Executing the Office of Lord High Admiral of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

²²⁵ Joseph Trutch, acting as Dominion Government Agent, to RAdm Sir Michael Culme-Seymour, 11 July 1887, Pacific Station Records.

careers, and it had ruined companies.²²⁶ The only question which remained was whether it would prove itself worth all the effort.

²²⁶ “Esquimalt Graving Dock – Successful Opening of the Dock Yesterday Afternoon,” Colonist, 21 July 1887, p. 1; “The Graving Dock – First Ship Enters, Everything Working Smoothly,” Victoria Daily Times, 21 July 1887, p. 4; Geoffrey Castle, “Drydock Built Despite Financial, Political Problems,” Victoria Times-Colonist, 18 July 1987, n.p.; and Esquimalt – First Graving Dock – Thetis Cove – Esquimalt Harbour, CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum Archives.

Chapter V

The Results: Was it Worth all the Trouble?

The question of whether or not the Esquimalt Graving Dock was worth all of the trouble it caused is a complex one, and the answer depends upon one's point of view. In general, the four main players – the Imperial, Dominion and provincial governments, and private shipowners – felt it was. Each benefited from the dock in different ways, but all were glad of its presence. In order to explain how each of these players gained from the dock's existence it is necessary to examine its subsequent history.

The party which had been expected to gain the most from the dock's construction, the Imperial government, only received a somewhat limited return on its investment. During the first fifteen years of the dock's operations, in which Her Majesty's ships were docked on a cost recovery basis, Royal Navy vessels constituted 90 of the 236 vessels handled. It is impossible to say if the amount of money saved through their discounted docking at Esquimalt made up for London's £50,000 contribution or not. It is unlikely, however, that this was the case, as during the first seven years of the dock's operation, when it serviced 70 merchant vessels, its total receipts were only \$32,000 above its operating costs.²²⁷ What can be said is that the Royal Navy, and ergo the Imperial government, benefited even after the fifteen years had elapsed due to the fact that the Esquimalt dock's full rates were still slightly less than those at Yokohama, and were between 30% and 50% of those at San Francisco, depending on the length of stay.²²⁸ Moreover, they received the benefit long desired by

²²⁷ Esquimalt – First Graving Dock, CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum Archives.

²²⁸ Bennett, The Esquimalt Graving Dock Works, p. 4.

the Pacific Station's Commanders-in-Chief – a repair facility located in British territory.

By the late 1890s it was clear that Esquimalt would not remain an important Imperial base much longer. By 1905 the number of ships on the Station had been reduced from seven to one, and the senior naval position was reduced from a Rear-Admiral to a Commander. In 1908 the trend reversed slightly, and the base was home to the obsolete Sloops-of-War HMS *Shearwater* and HMS *Algerine*, and well as the hydrographic survey vessel HMS *Egeria*.²²⁹ However, with all of the Pacific Station's larger ships recalled to Home waters to meet the rising threat from Imperial Germany, and with the British Empire in Alliance with Japan, and at least friendly with the United States, there seemed little reason to maintain a full dockyard at Esquimalt.

Thus, on 9 November 1910, all Imperial facilities at Esquimalt were turned over to the Dominion government to become the Pacific coast base of the newly-created Royal Canadian Navy. *Egeria* was decommissioned and sold in 1911, but *Shearwater* and *Algerine* remained at Esquimalt to carry out Britain's international treaty obligations and protect trade in Central America.²³⁰ They were joined during the First World War by the modern cruiser HMS *Newcastle*, which was sent to Esquimalt to help protect British shipping against German raiders. *Newcastle* was placed in the dock five times between 1914-1916. *Shearwater* was transferred to Canadian service in 1916, and while *Algerine* remained on the station until sold in 1919, she had the honour of being the very last Royal Navy vessel to enter the dock in September 1916.²³¹

²²⁹ Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base*, p. 62.

²³⁰ Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base*, pp. 62-63.

²³¹ CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum. *List of Vessels Entering the Esquimalt (1887) Drydock*. (Esquimalt: CFB Esquimalt, 1962), pp. 1-20; and Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base*, p. 62.

Many would look at subsequent events in the North Pacific, or more correctly the lack thereof, and argue that they made the dock a failure from the Imperial perspective. That would, however, be both unfair and incorrect. Like fortifications which are never attacked or warships which never fire a shot in anger, the drydock served its purpose to the Empire. True, it was open for less than twenty years before most Royal Navy ships left the station, but that could not have been known when construction began. And while HMS *Algerine* was the last Royal Navy vessel to be based at Esquimalt, she would not be the last British warship either to visit the harbour *or* enter a drydock there.

As for the province of British Columbia, hard facts and figures relating to the benefit it received by way of the dock's completion are difficult to come by, but can easily be imagined. For the fiscal year ended 30 June 1887, Victoria harbour alone had welcomed 589 seagoing and 773 coastal trading vessels, which brought in \$3,008,677 worth of imports, and carried out \$2,094,384 in exports.²³² While numbers for previous and subsequent years are not available, the presence of the transcontinental railway could only have caused them to increase. It seems reasonable to conclude that this increase was in part facilitated by the drydock, where many of them would have sought repairs, if necessary. The number of merchant ships using the dock in the years after its completion supports this conclusion. In 1887, only one commercial vessel used the dock, while in 1888 eleven did so. In 1889 this number rose to fourteen. It dipped to thirteen in 1890, but rose to twenty-one in 1891. By the end of its first decade of

²³² Canada. Estimates of Canada for the Fiscal Year Ending 30th June, 1889. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1889), pp. 202-203.

operation, the dock had welcomed 98 merchant ships and 38 warships, including the United States Ship *Mohican*.²³³

The importance of the dock to the city of Victoria specifically, for which the completion of the railway as far as Port Moody in 1885 was a mixed blessing, cannot be over-stated. During the summer of 1886 the first shipments of goods from the Orient intended for transshipment to the markets of eastern Canada and the United States on the C.P.R. arrived in B.C. waters.²³⁴ At that point, Canadian Pacific did not have any ships of its own, and all such trans-Pacific trade was contracted out to other companies. Unfortunately, these companies were interested mainly in carrying high-value cargoes from the Far East directly to Burrard Inlet for unloading, and tended to bypass Victoria, despite the urgings of William Van Horne, president of the C.P.R., for them to stop there. Thus, while the coastal trade flourished and Victoria's trade *did* increase as a result of this, the city largely being bypassed by the international trade meant that it was rapidly being marginalized relative to the mainland. The presence of the dock was still a great attraction to large ship-owners, and helped keep enough ships stopping at Victoria to maintain its relevancy. It is impossible to say just how long it could have done so, however, as the situation was alleviated in 1891 when the C.P.R. founded its own shipping company, Canadian Pacific Steamships, and made Victoria one of its regular ports of call.²³⁵

²³³ CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum, List of Vessels, pp. 1-5.

²³⁴ Robert D. Turner, The Pacific Empresses: An Illustrated History of Canadian Pacific Railway's Empress Liners on the Pacific Ocean. (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1981), p. 1.

²³⁵ Turner, The Pacific Empresses, pp. 13-14 and 26.

The drydock also very early on fulfilled its earliest proponent's wishes by encouraging the domestic shipping industry.²³⁶ Since it was owned and operated by the federal government, it was available to be used by anyone who wanted it. This universality of access allowed it to facilitate the founding of shipbuilding and repair firms such as Yarrows, which was established in 1913 a few hundred yards east of the drydock, and the Victoria Machinery Depot, founded later on Victoria's inner harbour.²³⁷ Its success also encouraged, albeit indirectly, the Burrard Dry Dock Company, founded in 1894 as a manufacturer of wooden lifeboats for Canadian Pacific, to expand and become the largest shipyard in Canada.²³⁸ The benefits of universal access continue today at the 1926 "Public Works" graving dock, where Victoria Shipyards, Nanaimo Shipyards and the Point Hope Shipyard all make use of the same facility.

The government which most benefited from the dock's construction, however, was the one which was originally thought to have the least to gain – the government of Canada. Aside from the benefits described above, which benefited it just as much as the others, Ottawa received the added bonus of Customs revenues, \$814,894.66 worth at Victoria alone in 1887. These, although largely a result of the Canadian Pacific Railway, would also have been enhanced by the completion of the drydock. And either way, this figure would have increased yearly, keeping pace with the growth in trade.²³⁹ Indeed, in 1889 the government was asked by the Canadian Pacific Railway to consider

²³⁶ Canadian Pacific Ships website - http://www.cp.ca/cp/e/div/02_cps.htm; and Maritime Museum of British Columbia website - <http://mmbc.bc.ca/source/schoolnet/commerce/cpcn.html>

²³⁷ Taylor, *Shipyards of British Columbia*, p. 11; and Maritime Museum of British Columbia website - <http://mmbc.bc.ca/source/schoolnet/commerce/shipbuilding.html>.

²³⁸ Burrard Dry Dock Company, Limited, *Progress: An Illustrative Presentation by Burrard Dry Dock Company Limited of Their War and Peacetime Shipbuilding Facilities in Canada's Largest Pacific Port - Vancouver, British Columbia, 1894-1946*. (North Vancouver: Burrard Dry Dock Company, 1946), p. 4.

lengthening the dock to ensure that it would be able to accommodate its new steamships scheduled to run between Vancouver, Japan and China. After consultation with the Imperial government Ottawa decided against this modification.²⁴⁰ Regardless, when they were completed, C.P.'s new steamships were able to fit inside the dock as it was, and became frequent customers.

That the federal government recognized the benefits to be gained from drydocks had been shown as early as 1882, when Sir John A. Macdonald's government had passed "an Act to encourage the construction of Dry Docks."²⁴¹ Its understanding was further demonstrated in 1910, when the Dominion Drydocks Act was passed concurrently with the Naval Service Act that established the Royal Canadian Navy. This act, like the Imperial government's Colonial Docks Act and Macdonald's 1882 Act, attempted to encourage drydock construction by private capitalists through subsidy.²⁴²

Canada's assumption of ownership of the Royal Naval Dockyard at Esquimalt that same year meant that, when added to the capabilities of the drydock, the federal government owned one of the most capable ship-repair facilities on the Pacific Coast of North America. Thus, the main motivation behind the passage of the Dominion Drydocks Act was most likely to facilitate the construction of a new dock at Halifax, where, despite the city having been an important British base since 1759, facilities had not kept pace with technology and the existing dock was too small to accommodate modern vessels. However, since this was also rapidly becoming the case with the

²³⁹ Canada, Estimates of Canada...1889, p. 202.

²⁴⁰ Commons, Debates, 1892, p. 530.

²⁴¹ Canada. Statutes of Canada, 45 Victoria, Chapter 17.

²⁴² Tucker, The Naval Service of Canada...: Volume I, pp. 164-165.

federally-owned docks at Québec and Esquimalt, it may have been intended to facilitate new docks there as well. Ultimately this Act, like the guarantee provided for in the Terms of Union forty years earlier, failed to encourage any private firm to undertake such a work. The old docks served on through the First World War and into the 1920s, with the Esquimalt dock playing host to such historically significant Canadian warships as the cruiser *Rainbow*, submarines *CC1* and *CC2*, sloop/tender *Shearwater*, trawler *Theipval* and torpedo-boat destroyer *Patrician*, along with numerous vessels owned by other federal government departments and privately owned ships as well.

Then, in 1921, recognizing the pressing need for larger and more modern ship-repair facilities, and after several years of campaigning by B.C. politicians, the Department of Public Works undertook the construction of three new drydocks, all built to similar designs, at Québec, Saint John and Esquimalt.²⁴³ They were built not just to accommodate the largest vessels of the Royal Navy, but the largest ships afloat. As constructed, the new Esquimalt dock was 1,173 feet in length and 126 feet across, with a depth over the sill of 40 feet.²⁴⁴ The capabilities of these docks were amply demonstrated during the Second World War, when the Saint John dock was used to refit Royal Navy battleships and that in Esquimalt was used to refit the 1,031 foot by 118 foot by 39 foot Cunard liner-turned troop transport *Queen Elizabeth* with defensive armament.²⁴⁵ Those in Saint John and Esquimalt are still in use today, although only

²⁴³ Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base*, p. 92.

²⁴⁴ Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada...: Volume I*, p. 337n.

²⁴⁵ Gilbert Norman Tucker. *The Naval Service of Canada, Its Official History: Volume II – Activities on Shore During the Second World War*. (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1952), pp. 217-218.

the Esquimalt dock, which remains the largest non-military dock on the Pacific coast of North America, is still publicly-owned.²⁴⁶

When the new “Songhees Drydock,” as it was then known, officially opened in 1926 with the docking of the tanker SS *Reginolite*, the future of the old drydock was somewhat uncertain. Public Works officials were not sure that there would be enough business to keep both docks operating, particularly as the 1887 dock’s plant and machinery were almost forty years old. Between September 1926 and June 1927, twenty – mostly C.P. and R.C.N. – ships were docked there, at which time the dock was closed. The final ship to enter the dock, the 838th vessel to do so, was the Canadian Pacific Steamship *Princess Charlotte*.²⁴⁷

After this final docking, the old caisson was removed from the dock and it was left tidal. It must certainly have seemed at that point that the dock’s history was at an end, and that it would either be filled in and forgotten as Esquimalt expanded or, perhaps, remain as an historical remnant. As the years passed by this fate seemed more certain but then fate, or more correctly Adolf Hitler, intervened. With the outbreak of the Second World War and the sudden increase in demand for ship-building and repairing facilities, the dock was turned over to the Royal Canadian Navy for use as a refitting basin. It was used as such until 1941, when, with the outbreak of war with Japan, Esquimalt’s importance as a naval base increased substantially.²⁴⁸

Within months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the futures of both the town of Esquimalt and the 1887 drydock had been drastically altered. Much of the town,

²⁴⁶ Public Works and Government Services Canada website - <http://www.pwgsc.gc.ca/pacific/egd/general.htm>

²⁴⁷ CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum, *List of Vessels*, p. 20; and Castle, “Drydock Built Despite Financial, Political Problems,” n.p..

including the land surrounding the drydock, was expropriated by the federal government and added to the dockyard. Homes, businesses and schools were razed to make way for wartime expansion, and the R.C.N. decided to re-activate the old drydock, albeit as a low priority. Accordingly, a new steel caisson was built and installed by Yarrows, and the dock pumped out for examination. Aside from more than fifteen years worth of silt and seaweed accumulation, the dock was found to be in good condition for its age. New electric pumping equipment was ordered and installed, and the dock was declared ready for renewed operation, with the frigate HMCS *Coaticook* being the first ship to enter the dock since 1927. Unfortunately, due to the low priority it was given, this did not happen until 31 August 1945, almost two weeks after the Second World War ended.²⁴⁹

Despite the impetus for its reclamation disappearing, the Navy kept both the expropriated land and the drydock as part of its post-war establishment. This gave the Pacific Fleet the ability to dock ships of up to destroyer size whenever it liked without having to make reservations or pay fees to the Department of Public Works. Between 1945 and 1962, there were 454 dockings, almost all of R.C.N. ships, and since then there have been hundreds more.²⁵⁰ Even today, by a fortunate coincidence (because no-one thought to check), the Navy's newest Halifax-class frigates can be accommodated in the dock.

Clearly, the federal government, and the Navy in particular, have gained the most from the building of the first drydock. Had the utility of such a facility to them

²⁴⁸ G. R. Hearn, "Rehabilitation of the First Graving Dock." *The Dockyard News*. (June, 1962)(Esquimalt: H.M.C. Dockyard), p. 11.

²⁴⁹ Hearn, "Rehabilitation of the First Graving Dock," p. 11; and Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada...: Volume II*, p. 227.

not been proven by the 1887 dock, then they most certainly would not have approved the expenditure for the larger 1926 dock, or for docks elsewhere in the country. Nor would they have paid for the reclamation of the old dock during the war. So, for an initial investment of \$1,171,664.74 and the cost of the reclamation and maintenance over the years, Canada has now benefited from the dock's services for 114 years. Few public structures have provided such service for so long at such a comparatively modest price.

The fourth group to benefit from the dock's construction were private shipowners. As mentioned above, the presence of the drydock and the construction of various aids to navigation such as lighthouses, reduced insurance rates for vessels frequenting the British Columbia coast. Previously, when a ship came to grief in these waters, the insurer had to pay not only for the ship's repair, but also for getting it to a repair facility. And the cost of patching a ship temporarily and towing it to San Francisco could increase the costs exponentially.

And while the original drydock is no longer used by merchant shipping, its successor is almost never unoccupied, despite the fact that modern ships rarely have accidents of the type or frequency which befell their predecessors. Vancouver is by far the busiest port in Canada, and after Seattle is the second busiest port on the West coast of North America, with Prince Rupert a distant third.²⁵¹ Esquimalt, commanding the eastern entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, is therefore astride the route from the two busiest West Coast ports to the sea, and as a result of this is in a good position to attract business. In addition to a steady stream of B.C. Ferries and Navy vessels, such as the

²⁵⁰ Hearn, "Rehabilitation of the First Graving Dock," p. 11.

²⁵¹ Statistics Canada website - <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/990604/d990604b.htm>

replenishment ships, which are either too large for the old drydock or need the new dock's larger-capacity cranes, the Esquimalt Graving Dock services everything from fish-factory ships to large cruise ships and container vessels from a dozen different countries. It is doubtful that any of this, or the hundreds of jobs associated with it, would have been possible if the original drydock had never been built.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to bring out into the public forum an important piece of British Columbian and Canadian history, the facility now known as the Esquimalt Naval Drydock. The preceding chapters have explored in some detail the history behind this important historical artifact. Specifically, they examined the motivation behind its construction, the factors behind the substantial delays which were experienced, and whether or not the dock delivered the benefits expected of it. From this, what can be said without question is that the Esquimalt Naval Drydock was and is many things to many people. It has both met the requirements of its builders, and has proven itself capable of continued useful service 114 years after it first opened.

The Imperial government in London, or more correctly the Admiralty, supported the building of the drydock because it felt that it would strengthen Imperial defence in the Pacific. And while it was never really tested in such a role, it really did not need to be. Like a fortress which is never required to fire its guns in anger, the Esquimalt drydock served its main purpose just by being there. Unlike such a fortress, however, the drydock was able to make important contributions to Imperial defence during peacetime through the maintenance of Her Majesty's Ships.

The motivation of the colonial and later the provincial government for supporting the drydock's construction was more commercial than military, although the defence of their coastline was a factor. By building a drydock at Esquimalt, they intended to encourage an increase in shipping traffic to their ports, thereby improving communications with the outside world and lowering the prices of imports and exports. The drydock would furthermore enable them to lure some business away from Mare

Island, and perhaps even allow Victoria to become a city capable of competing with San Francisco. Just as importantly, the presence of the dock would, in their opinion, also virtually guarantee the continued presence of the Pacific Squadron in B.C. waters. To their mind, this would in turn mean even more business for Victoria's merchants and tradesmen, and would serve to deter any enemy from choosing to attack the city.

For the Dominion government, the only motivation needed was British Columbia's entry into Confederation. By meeting B.C.'s demands as set out in the Terms of Union, the Canadian government was taking a huge step towards the building of its own North American empire. To be sure, the federal government saw the commercial and military benefits of the dock, but these were not its greatest motivating factors.

The reasons for its taking so long to be built, despite widespread support for it, of course centered mainly around who was going to pay for it. It was often caught in a three-way tug-of-war between the Imperial, Canadian and British Columbian governments. At first, its proponents hoped that someone would be willing to build and operated the dock as a private enterprise, albeit with a government subsidy to assist. When this plan failed, the provincial government decided to build and operated the dock itself, with funding contributed by the federal and Imperial governments. In the end, however, the project had to be taken over by the federal government, which took London's contribution and generously reimbursed British Columbia all of the money which had already been spent on the project.

Money was not the only issue, however, as questions regarding its eventual location and type were debated everywhere from the wooden walls of the Pacific

Station's ships to the streets of Victoria, Nanaimo and New Westminster, and the halls of power in Ottawa and London. Some, particularly the citizens of the communities involved, favoured building the dock somewhere other than Esquimalt, such as at Nanaimo or Burrard Inlet. And some favoured building a floating drydock or some otherwise less substantial substitute. When all was done, however, wiser men and the Admiralty's money had prevailed, and the large, permanent stone dock was built near the naval dockyard at Esquimalt.

As for the benefits which resulted from the dock, it seems reasonable to conclude that each of the interested parties received what they had originally desired. The Royal Navy got a very capable repair facility located in British territory in the North Pacific, and although most of the Pacific Station's ships were withdrawn to Home waters in the years that followed, the dock was there if they ever had to return. The British Columbia government got a piece of infrastructure which indirectly improved the province's prosperity and contributed to its defence. And the Dominion government got both British Columbia within Confederation and a drydock which would faithfully and usefully serve the Departments of Public Works and National Defence.

Overall, it must be said that the building of the first Esquimalt drydock is a project from which much can be learned about the early relations between what were effectively three levels of government – provincial, federal and Imperial. It is a project which, although monetarily insignificant in comparison to better-known schemes such as the building of the C.P.R., was incredibly important to many different people, for many different reasons. The existing historiography, those works which were

examined in the introduction, have done very little to further our understanding of these issues, and have overlooked the truly important role which the Esquimalt Naval Drydock has played in the history of British Columbia and of Canada for far too long. Hopefully this thesis has served to give it its due.

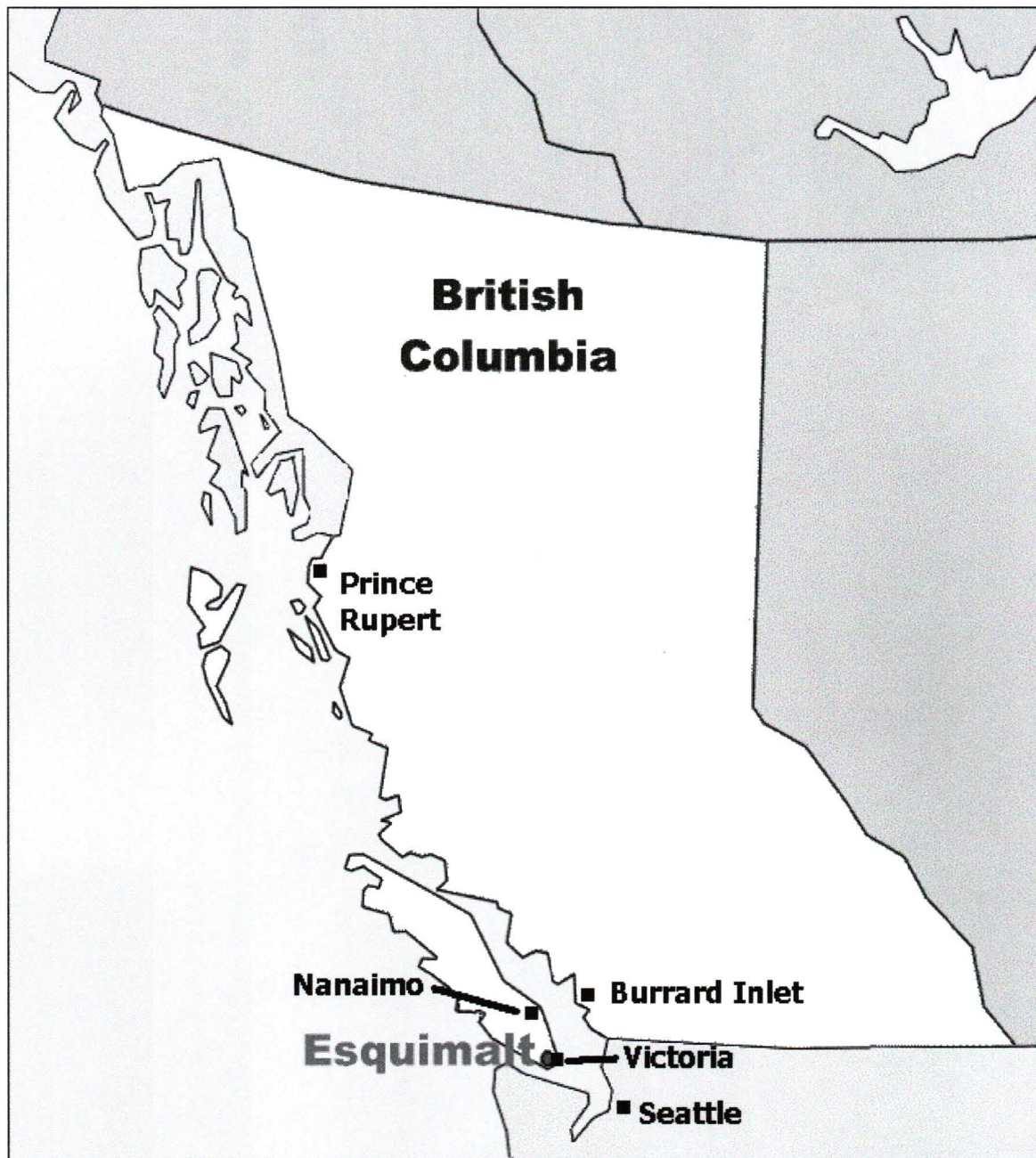
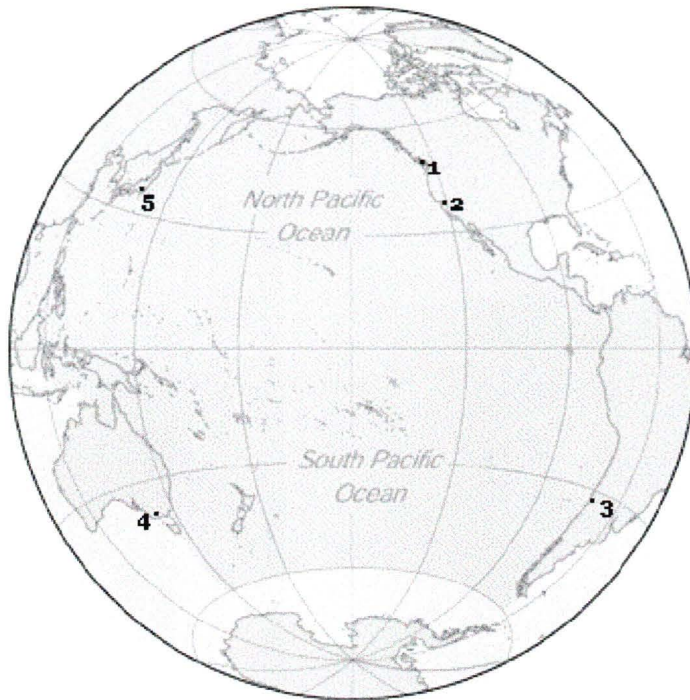
FIGURE 2**MAP OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND AREA, SHOWING IMPORTANT SITES**

FIGURE 3**LEGEND**

1. ESQUIMALT, BRITISH COLUMBIA
2. SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
3. VALPARAISO, CHILE
4. MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA
5. YOKOHAMA, JAPAN

MAP OF PACIFIC OCEAN, SHOWING RELEVANT PORTS

COURTESY OF THE GENERAL LIBRARIES, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.

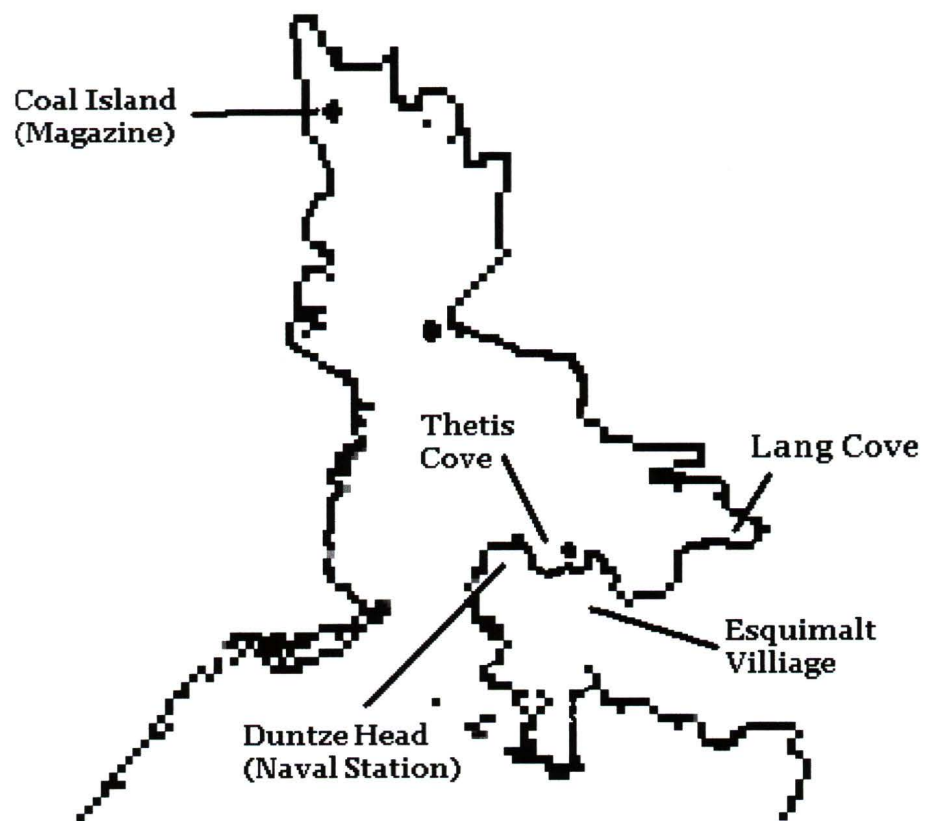
FIGURE 4**MAP OF ESQUIMALT HARBOUR IN 1860S**

FIGURE 5

B.C. ARCHIVES D-01649



ESQUIMALT HARBOUR, 1870s

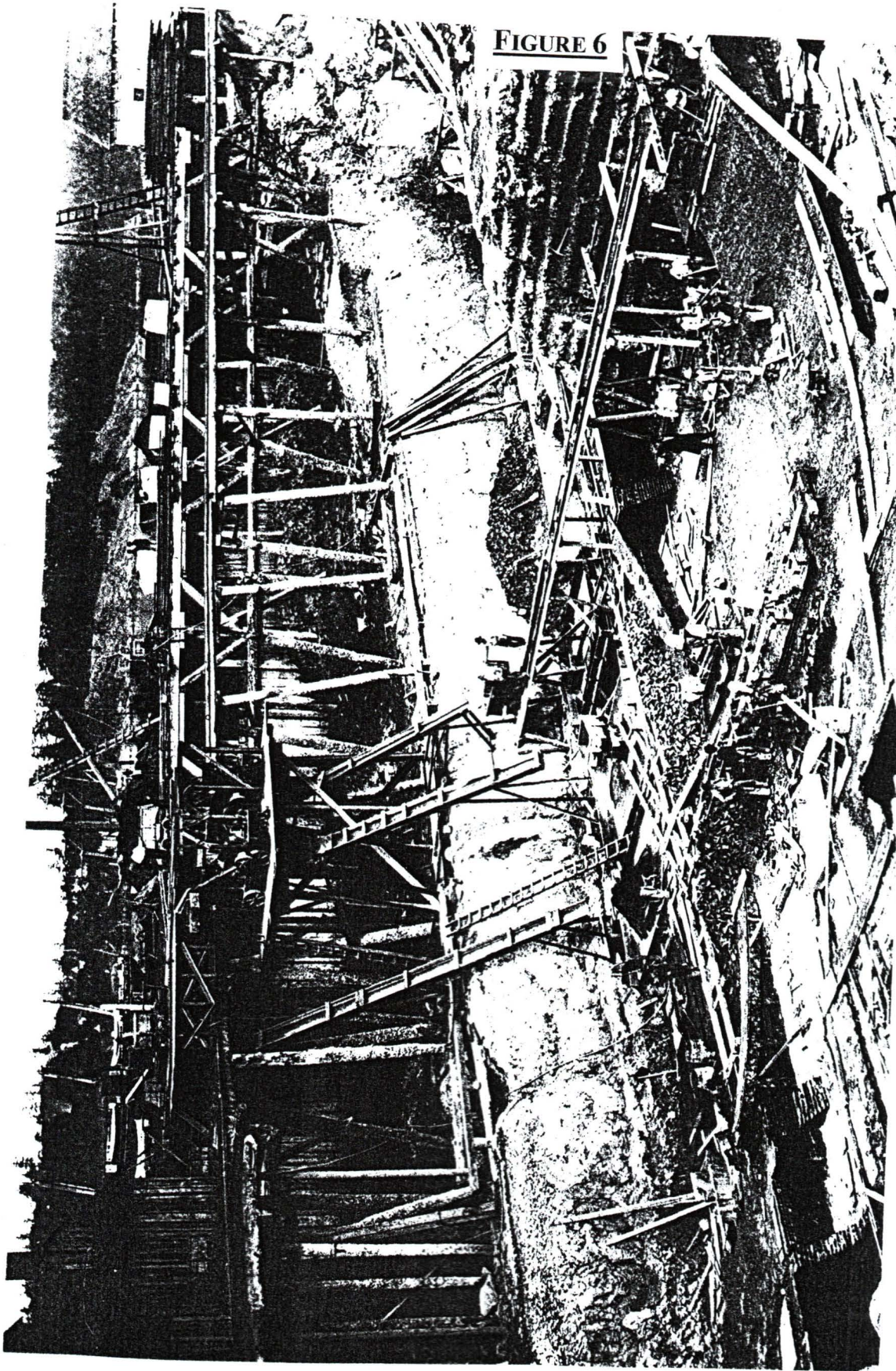


FIGURE 6

DRYDOCK UNDER CONSTRUCTION

B.C. ARCHIVES C-03861

FIGURE 7

B.C. ARCHIVES F-04801

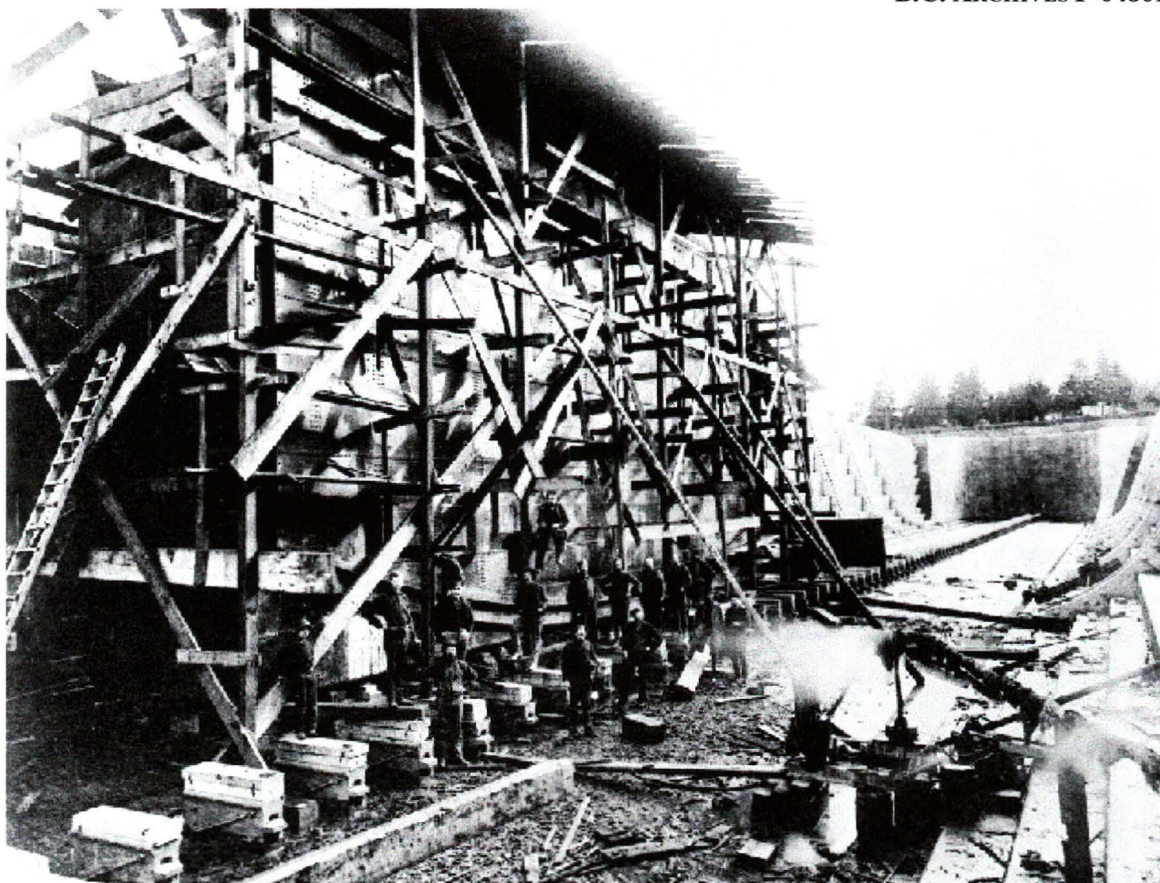
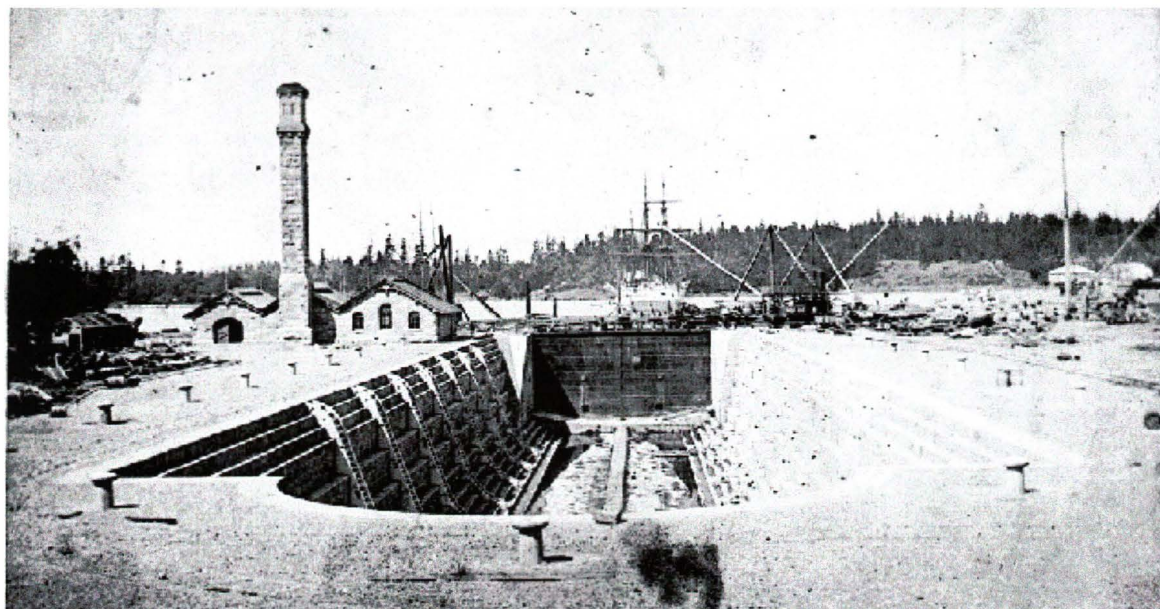
**DRYDOCK UNDER CONSTRUCTION, SHOWING ORIGINAL CAISSON, 1880s**

FIGURE 8

B.C. ARCHIVES A-00162



DRYDOCK AS COMPLETED, 1887

FIGURE 9

B.C. ARCHIVES A-04645



HMS CORMORANT ENTERING DRYDOCK, 20 JULY 1887

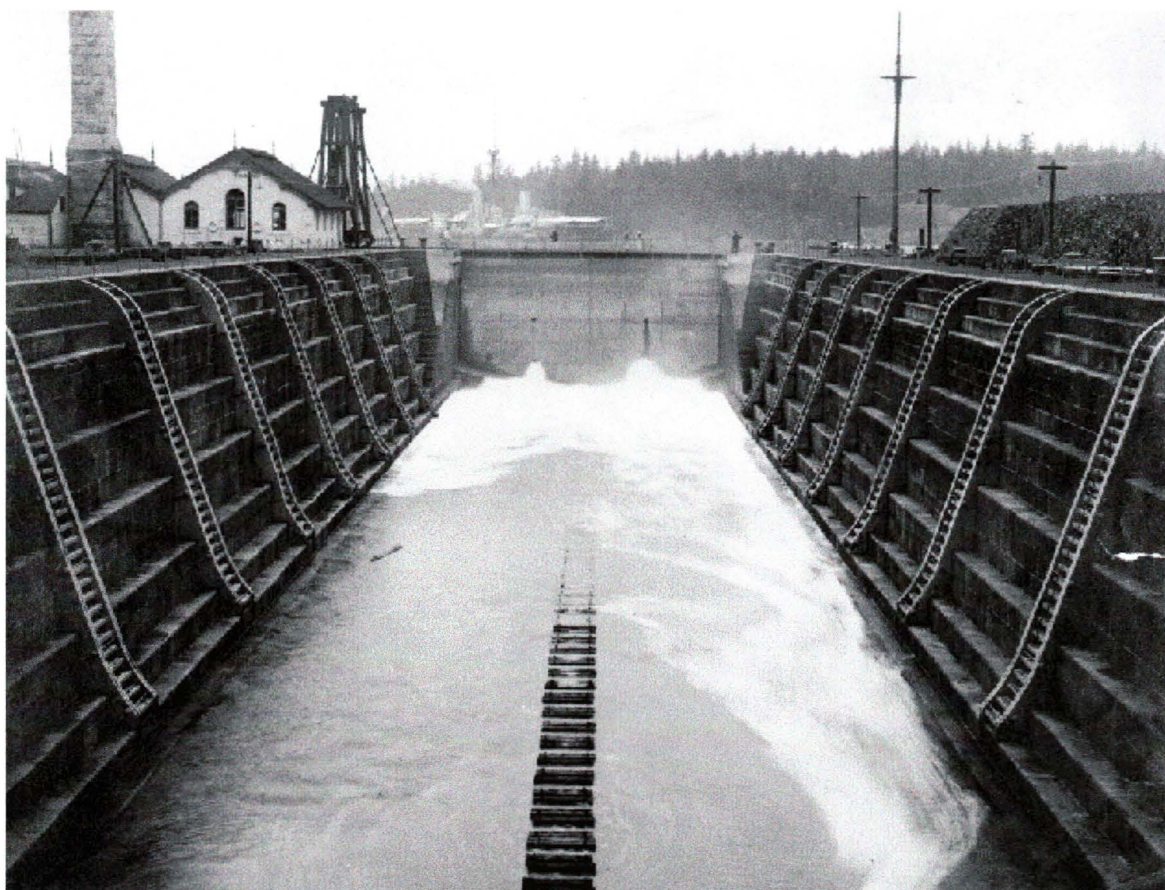
FIGURE 10

B.C. ARCHIVES A-03106

**FIRST STAFF OF DRYDOCK, 1887**

FIGURE 11

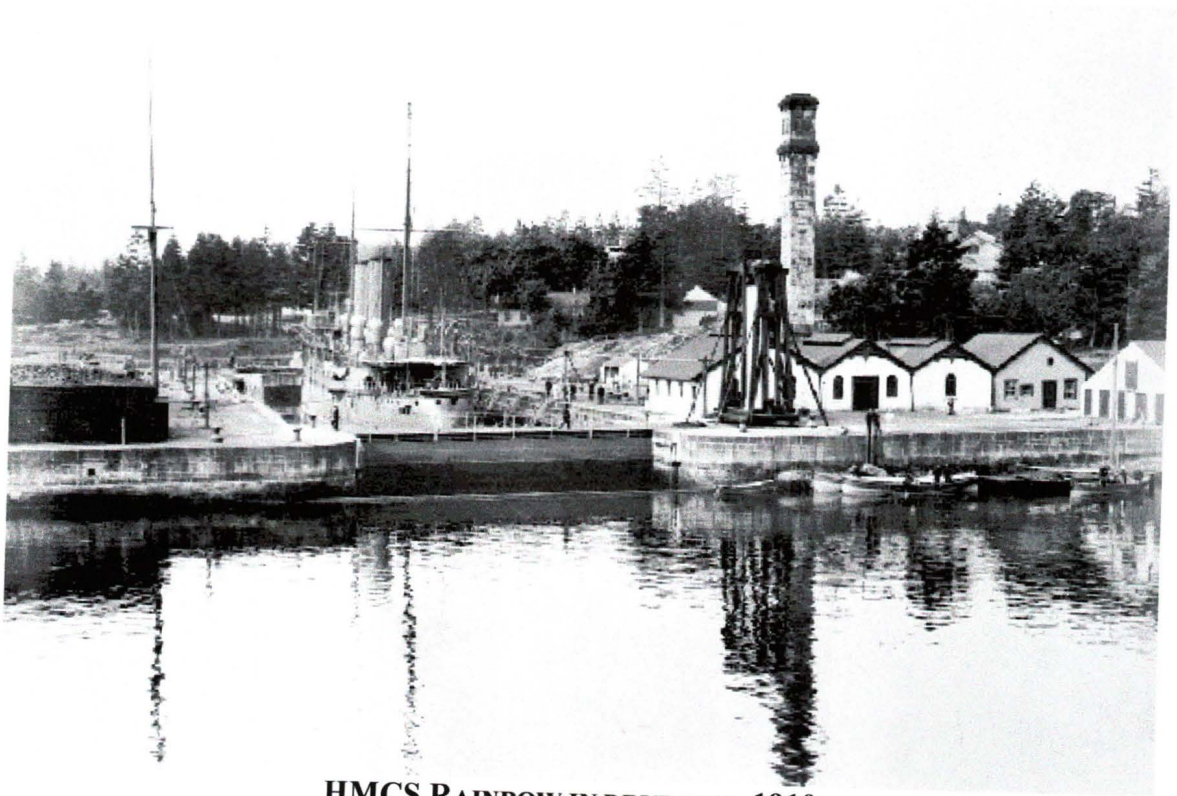
B.C. ARCHIVES F-04796



DRYDOCK BEING FILLED, HMS WARSPITE IN BACKGROUND, 1900S

FIGURE 12

B.C. ARCHIVES A-00363



HMCS RAINBOW IN DRYDOCK, 1910s

FIGURE 13

B.C. ARCHIVES D-01372

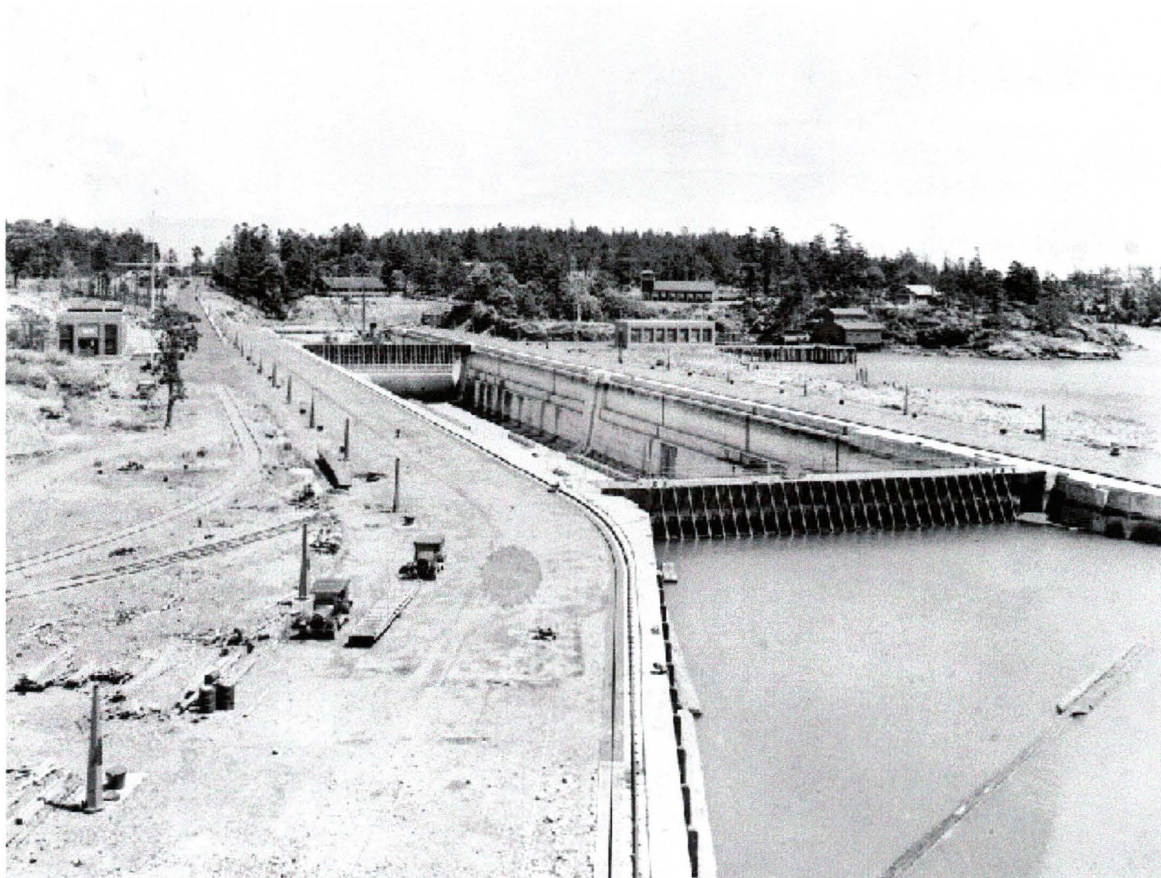
**“SONGHEES GRAVING DOCK” AS COMPLETED, 1920S**

FIGURE 15**B.C. ARCHIVES F-04520****FIRST GRAVING DOCK PUMPED OUT FOR REHABILITATION, 1945**

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