

Lions Bay
Historical Society

Looking Back

by Trudi Luethy

Did you know that the city of Vienna is celebrating its 1000th birthday this summer? If you didn't know, don't feel bad, neither did I. Anybody who is planning to be in Vienna this summer will have the experience of a lifetime in that wonderful city which is always filled with music.

In comparison to our 25th anniversary we have barely taken our first breath, when it comes to the historical scale. No matter how young our history, people have always been a part of it at every stage. Photographs in the family album and in our local archives are a gentle reminder of the memories.

The Historical Society has a keen ear for Lions Bay stories and hopefully we have captured your interest with this column.

The house that is no more

This is a unique story and we hope you will enjoy reading it. Unless you have lived in Lions Bay for sometime you might not recognize the house. This property on Howe Sound was already in the news long before I knew that there was a Lions Bay. Jack Wassermann, a writer for the Vancouver Sun, found it important to let his readers know that someone had bought a piece of very expensive waterfront property in Lions Bay. George and Margaret Butt had immigrated to Canada from England with their two children, Robert and Mary. The

Butt family owned a successful deep sea trawler business. Mrs. Butt would often say: "George makes his money on the high seas, but his real love is fishing. He had a great passion for fly-fishing. In the late '50s, \$27,000 (approx.) was an exorbitant amount of money and the city-slickers couldn't quite understand why anybody in their right mind would pay this amount of money for a waterfront property. Since Lions Bay was "way out there" how could this be the most expensive, residential piece of real estate to be sold in Western Canada. What people on the other side of the Lions Gate bridge didn't know was that George and Margaret purchased two lots. Building a beautiful home on Howe Sound compensated for leaving their family, friends, high taxes and English culture behind.

Frank Parrott, who lived in Lions Bay at the time shared his historical tidbits with me. Frank Nielson and Oskar Grann were the two builders. Nobody seems to remember the name of the architect and according to Mr. Parrott, he was dismissed before the house was completed. One of Frank's vivid memories is seeing Mrs. Butt, her chequebook in hand asking the two gentlemen if \$10,000 would assure their work on the house. All parties agreed

and construction continued. The beautifully-polished wood paneling was rich in colour and fancy chandeliers hung from ceilings. Frank was one of the people who laid the high quality carpet and many of the exquisite, fine silk rugs had been brought over from England. The winding staircase led to the floor below. There were more bedrooms, a bar and Mr. Butt's office. He would make his own flies for his next fishing trip while looking out at the gorgeous view. The floor below also had a maid's quarter and thirty-six years ago that must have been very posh for Lions Bay.

As luck might have it, I met a woman in the latter part of the seventies by the name of Jessie Cunliffe. She was a friend of Jon and Pam Strom (former residents of 420 Bayview Rd.). Jessie proudly announced that she had lived in Lions Bay in the sixties. It turned out that Jessie had been the housekeeper at the famous waterfront house. Her family had immigrated to Canada in 1907 from Edinburgh, Scotland. Coming to Canada at the turn of the century must have been an adventure for a two-year-old child. Jessie lived with her husband in Prince George and Hazelton and loved the north with all her heart. She was widowed early in life and this was how she supported herself. She was an excellent cook, baked the most delicious cakes, breads and pastries. Her scrumptious lemon pies were my favorite. She was one of those cooks that never needed to look at a recipe.

Her early experiences in

life made her very competent and you knew that Jessie could handle any situation. She had a zest for life and I loved her great sense of humor. The years that we were friends I listened to many of her wonderful stories. Today I wish I would have documented her stories. Jessie would tell of the parties in Lions Bay that were as famous as Mr. Butt's perfectly mixed martinis. While George Butt would stir and shake drinks behind the bar, business deals would be discussed and sealed with a honest handshake. It must have been quite a sight to see people all dressed up driving on the Squamish Highway heading to the quiet, little hamlet on Howe Sound.

Noel Day lived in Lions Bay in those quiet days and was often invited to the Butt house for a party. Noel and I have talked many pages of Lions Bay history. Once again luck was on my side. Guess who was at the Bell Bottom Bash? Noel Day and I were talking once again about the Butts. "Trudi," he said, "you must try and get in touch with a lady by the name of Jill. She used to be Margaret Butt's hairdresser!" With her name scribbled on a paper napkin I searched in the phonebook. I had only two phone numbers by Monday morning when I dialed my first call. There was a voice on the other side. I introduced myself and when I asked her if Lions Bay meant anything to her she said "Yes." "Does the name Margaret Butt mean anything to you?" was my second question. "Yes," she said once again. "Are you by any chance the Jill that used to be Margaret Butt's hairdresser?" "Yes," she said. "But my dear", "I was her

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