

Stories From The Archives —
Admiralty Point ‘Pest House’ Proposal
Researched and written by Ralph Drew, Belcarra, BC, August 2017.

During 1908, the ‘City of Vancouver’ was lobbying the ‘Dominion Government of Canada’ to lease the ‘Admiralty Point Military Reserve’, opposite ‘Barnet’, as a site for a new city jail and hospital. The city also wanted to obtain permanent title to ‘Stanley Park’. ⁽¹⁾

In April 1909, the ‘City of Vancouver’ was struggling to accommodate an increasing influx of sickness and indigence cases involving people from other parts of the province. There was a sense of urgency to deal with the matter before the next winter as the city was concerned that it would have “a small army of indigent, and sick paupers to deal with”. City Alderman Crowe suggested that the old “pest house” (communicable diseases isolation hospital) in Vancouver be used for the purpose, after a new “pest house” was built on the government military reserve which the city was in the process of leasing. The city’s Medical Health Officer, Dr. Frederick T. Underhill, thought the suggestion was an excellent idea that would enable the health department to readily relieve the situation. ⁽²⁾

In May 1909, property owners on the North Arm of Burrard Inlet (Indian Arm), were opposed to erection of a jail and “pest house” on the government military reserve, in particular the investors who in 1908 had created the new subdivision on District Lot 229 around Belcarra Bay. ⁽³⁾ A protest was sent to the Minister of Militia in Ottawa by a number of property owners, regarding the city building a “pest house” at ‘Isolation Point’ — named ‘Admiralty Point’ in 1940 ⁽⁴⁾ — which resulted in the following telegram to the city from the Deputy Minister of Militia: ⁽⁵⁾

“Report has reached my minister that your city is about to erect pest house on military reserve leased to the city as site for jail. Order-in-council authorizes lease for sole purpose of providing a site for jail. Construction of a pest house must not be proceeded with. Am writing.” – Deputy Minister of Militia, Ottawa

The city administration maintained that a contagious diseases hospital was imperative and felt that obstacles were needlessly being put in the way of the city providing what was probably its most urgent requirement.

A letter to ‘The Daily World’ raised probably the earliest proposal that the government military reserve become a marine park: ⁽⁶⁾

“The Barnet reserve [*sic.* Admiralty Point Military Reserve] contains about 210 acres of land, and as a marine park would be more valuable for the people of Vancouver, especially now that no other public park is available on Burrard Inlet. By the erection of a pest house, the land will be destroyed for park purposes.” – A.C. Ray, The Bedwell Bay & Belcarra Co. Ltd.

Arthur Charles Ray was the general manager of ‘The Bedwell Bay & Belcarra Co. Ltd.’ that purchased ‘Bole’s Ranch’ (District Lot 229) at Belcarra, and construction of a “pest house” would not have been conducive to the sale of recreational properties a little north of the proposed site. ⁽⁷⁾ A letter to ‘The Daily World’ from Frederick Coate Wade, KC, president of the company, offered the following rebuttal to the City of Vancouver: ⁽⁸⁾

“Apart from the almost superstitious abhorrence toward smallpox which arose at a time when the disease was little understood, and is now confined to remote Indian tribes and a few people in Vancouver, there is no reason for banishing a smallpox hospital across the water, and nine miles away.” – F.C. Wade, President, The Bedwell Bay & Belcarra Co. Ltd.

In the end, a “pest house” was not built on the ‘Admiralty Point Military Reserve’, and in April 1913 a 99-year lease was granted to the ‘City of Vancouver’ to utilize the government military reserve for park purposes.



City of Vancouver Archives (CVA 677-136).

**'Deadman's Island' in Coal Harbour, Burrard Inlet, *circa* 1910 — view looking north —
In the 1890s, there was a smallpox outbreak in Vancouver, and Deadman's Island was used
as a "pest house" (contagious disease isolation site) where those who fell ill were quarantined. ⁽⁹⁾**

References:

- (1) Vancouver Daily World, Friday, October 23rd, 1908, page 2.
- (2) Vancouver Daily World, Wednesday, April 7th, 1909, page 27.
- (3) Vancouver Daily World, Friday, May 21st, 1909, page 8.
- (4) "Third Narrows Point Is Named", Vancouver Province, August 15th, 1940, page 25.
- (5) Vancouver Daily World, Saturday, May 22nd, 1909, page 6.
- (6) Vancouver Daily World, Tuesday, May 25th, 1909, page 5.
- (7) Vancouver Daily World, Monday, July 5th, 1909, page 1.
- (8) Vancouver Daily World, Tuesday, April 5th, 1910, page 6.
- (9) Kendall Walters, 2014, "The Strange Haunted History of Deadman's Island", <https://forbiddenvancouver.ca/2014/10/15/the-strange-haunted-history-of-deadmans-island/>