

## 36 Stewart Avenue: 1912

Located on a narrow lot bounded by a main thoroughfare and the waterfront, the residence at 36 Stewart Avenue is a highly visible neighbourhood landmark. Built in 1912, the house displays many sophisticated features of Craftsman style architecture. The complex gable roof covers a bungalow form, with a corner entry and an unusual round projecting bay at the southwest corner. Stained glass panels and straight-lead glass are used as decorative features. Half-timbering in the gable ends, triangular eave brackets, and exposed rafter ends are other hallmarks of the Craftsman style.



### Who lived here?

1. **Zillah Cooke Johnston & Harry Leslie Johnston 1912-1914**
2. **Washington Everett Wilks & Muriel Alison May Hudson 1914-1921**
3. **Frank S Cunliffe & Agnes Forman Nicol: 1925- 1958**

## ANGUS RUTHERFORD JOHNSTON & ZILLAH COOKE 1912-1914

The house at 36 Stewart was built in 1912 for Zillah Johnston, the widow of Angus Rutherford Johnston a pioneer grocer in Nanaimo. Son Harry Leslie Johnston, manager at the time of the A.R. Johnston Co. Ltd., also lived here.

The origins of Angus Rutherford Johnston are a bit hazy and full of potential genealogical pitfalls. According to his marriage certificate, Angus was born in Glasgow in 1842 the son of Angus W Johnston and Mary Campbell. The *1901 Census of Canada* confirms that his birthdate was Aug 12 1842.<sup>1</sup> His death certificate estimates his birth as 1841. However, other stories about Angus Rutherford Johnston claim that his father's name was actually Alec Johnston and that he was born ten years earlier on Aug 12 1832.

There is an Angus Johnston who married a Mary Campbell on Apr 18 1826 in Kilarrow Church, Bowmore on the island of Islay which is just west of Glasgow. Unfortunately, there is no corresponding birth certificate for a son called Angus. However, an Australian descendant of one of Angus and Mary Campbell Johnston's other sons, John Johnston (1826-1897), confirms that Angus Rutherford Johnston was indeed their son: *Angus and Mary Campbell had about 10 children. Son Angus ended up in Nanaimo, Canada after quite a stint in South America...The Johnstons seem to be an adventurous bunch.*<sup>2</sup>

In historic times, the island of Islay was amok with distilleries one of which was the Tallant Distillery established in 1821 by brothers Donald and John Johnston at Tallant Farm, near Bowmore. Excise records until 1827 show this distillery recorded as one of two 'Bowmore' distilleries. It appears to have been a

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<sup>1</sup> Census of Canada 1901 says his birth date is 1842 but then he would have been only 10 years old when he went off to South America! I'm assuming that his birth date was 1832 as per bios of Angus.

<sup>2</sup> <https://beyondtheflow.wordpress.com/2018/07/08/a-shocking-case-of-bigamy/>  
<https://www.genealogy.com/forum/surnames/topics/macarthur/658/> Rowena Newton (Curtin), Umina Beach, New South Wales, Australia; emailed Aug 11 2012 to: [rowenanewtn@outlook.com](mailto:rowenanewtn@outlook.com)

true farm-scale operation with Angus W Johnston Sr listed at one point as distillery manager. It was never, however, a profitable commercial operation, perhaps in part due to generous drams John provided to visiting workmen and farmers. Output was as low as 220 gallons (998 litres) a week and reached 2,101 gallons (9,538 litres) in the year 1826-27. The business folded in 1852, although John's brother Donald and his son, Alexander, were to become successful distillers figuring prominently with Laphroaig's development. Tallant Farm exists today and many buildings from those distilling days remain, albeit some in a state of collapse.<sup>3</sup>



When the business folded, it is probable that Angus W Johnston Sr moved his family off the island looking for other opportunities. The *1851 Scotland Census* has the Johnston family living in Inverness at 19 Wells Street where son, Angus Johnston, is 13 years old. By 1861, Angus Sr has moved what remains of his family, which were his wife and youngest daughter Elizabeth, to 37 Gloucester Street in Glasgow and is working as a "railway servant". Some of his descendants think that he was a railway detective. By this time, Angus Rutherford Johnston, possibly at the age of 15, has left the nest and according to family legend is already on the trail of adventure in South America as some kind of Indiana Jones type character having graduated as a civil engineer from Edinburgh University.

Angus apparently went to Chile in the early 1850's to work on the construction of a railway. Later he joined expeditions exploring Peru, Ecuador and Nicaragua. In Nicaragua, William Walker, an American adventurer, had set himself up as President of Nicaragua in 1855 inspired by the Manifest Destiny movement to annex additional territory for the USA. Johnston was so outraged he volunteered with the local military forces which succeeded in ousting Walker. Later Johnston took passage from Chile to California on a ship which was wrecked on the South American coast. He was one of only three survivors. Arriving eventually in California he apparently joined survey expeditions to Arizona and Utah. He came to



Victoria in 1858 in time for the Fraser River and Caribou gold rush and appears to have been quite successful in those gold fields although one of his partners died of starvation.

The Caribou Gold Rush of 1858 created strong ties between Vancouver Island and the United States. News of gold strikes in BC's interior sent thousands of American miners passing through Victoria and also Nanaimo on their way to the gold fields. Some ended up staying in Nanaimo, causing a mini population boom.

In the fall of 1859, Angus returned to Victoria but by 1862 he was off to the Caribou to try his luck once more at prospecting and spent eleven years in the territory. A.R. Johnston is listed in the *1872 BC Directory of the Caribou* as a "miner". In 1873, he left the Caribou and spent two years in Seattle before returning to Victoria.

In 1877, at the age of 35, he moved to Nanaimo and set up a grocery and building supply business partnering with Thomas Watson Glaholm in 1879. A.R. Johnston & Co., wholesale and retail grocers

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.islayinfo.com/lostdistilleries.html>

at the corner of Bastion and Commercial streets offered everything from groceries and grain to general farm produce and was also the agent for the Pacific Coast Steamship Company which operated along the west coast from Alaska to San Diego. Angus would readily become one of the foremost representatives of the commercial interests of the city.<sup>4</sup>

## ZILLAH COOKE

In the meantime, Zillah Cooke was born Sep 12 1860 in Londonderry, Colchester, Nova Scotia a descendant of a family who had lived in Nova Scotia since the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. She was the daughter of Ephraim Boyd Cooke (May 24 1828- Feb 19 1897) and Julia Ann Elizabeth Stevens (Jun 12 1827- Oct 30 1905) who were also born in Nova Scotia; and had married on Mar 12 1853 in a Baptist service at Onslow, NS.

### THE HISTORY OF ZILLAH'S FAMILY IN NOVA SCOTIA

Ephraim's parents, John Boyd Cooke (1789-1864) and Mary (Ann) B Carr (1795-1870) were also born in Colchester NS as were those of Elizabeth Stevens father, Ezra Stevens (Aug 17 1796-1852) and mother Sarah Crowe (Feb 1798- Jul 6 1875). Ephraim's grandfather, Ralph Cooke (ca1750 – 1827) was the original emigrant to Nova Scotia coming from Londonderry in Ulster Ireland with his parents, James Cooke (ca1700-1794) and wife Martha (d1807) in 1761.<sup>5</sup>

On Zillah's mother's side, her great grandfather, Thomas Stevens (May 27 1754-1828) was born in Hardwick, Worcester, Massachusetts the son of Thomas Stevens (1730-ca1798) and Elizabeth Perkins (Oct 23 1720 - abt1791). They too would emigrate to Nova Scotia 1761.

Both of Zillah's ancestors, the ones from Ireland and the others from Massachusetts came to Nova Scotia as a result of a proclamation in 1759 issued by British Governor, Colonel Charles Lawrence stationed in Halifax. Lawrence's legacy in Canadian history was as the chief architect behind the expulsion, in 1755, of all Acadians out of the province for not taking an unqualified oath of allegiance to the British crown.

By 1757, Halifax had grown to about 4,000, but Lawrence was realizing that some hardy souls were also required to work the arable farmland that had been vacated by the Acadians. The province needed an agricultural base to survive as it couldn't keep depending on supplies from England. The necessity for a reliable English-speaking population in Nova Scotia was getting even more urgent for military reasons as the French still occupied Fort Louisburg.

In Jun 1758, the French surrendered at Louisburg and on Oct 12 1758, Governor Charles Lawrence issued a proclamation inviting New Englanders to settle in Nova Scotia. The proclamation informed the people of New England that since the enemy which had formerly disturbed and harassed the province was no longer able to do so, the time had come to people and cultivate, not only the lands made vacant by the removal of the Acadians, but other parts of *"this valuable province."* The proclamation promised the availability of hundreds of thousands of acres of fertile crop land and concluded with the words *"I shall be ready to receive any proposals that may be hereafter made to me for effectually settling the vacated, or any other lands within the said province."*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://open.library.ubc.ca/viewer/bcbooks/1.0356573#p1161z-3r0f:angus%20johnston> Howay F.W. & Scholefield E.O.S. British Columbia from the earliest times to the present. Biographical. Volume III, The SJ Clarke Publishing Company 1914 Vol. 3 p.1154

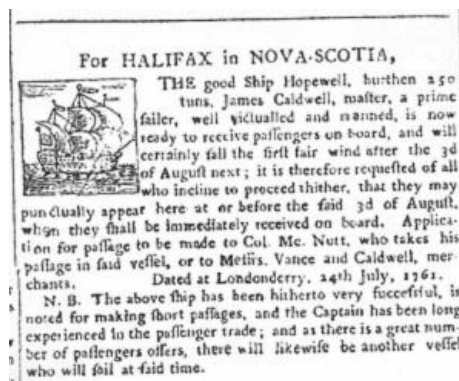
<sup>5</sup> <http://everywhereacookcooke.com/family-line/family-line/>

Early interest and inquiries to the proclamation both from individuals and groups were numerous. So much so, that on Jan 11 1759, a second proclamation needed to be issued informing would-be settlers of the actual terms they could expect promising not only representation in an elected government but freedom of religion at least for protestants.

New Englanders were not unfamiliar with Nova Scotia. They had spent generations fishing near in its shores and engaged in sometimes clandestine trade with its towns. Overcrowding and soil exhaustion in the older settled towns of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island further encouraged land hungry settlers to move north. The promise of over a hundred acres of land in Nova Scotia was enticing.

The Stevens family can trace their New England ancestors back to Cyprian Stevens (1647-1722) who came to Massachusetts around 1660. He married Mary Willard at Concord MA in 1671, the daughter of Simon Willard quite a famous and prestigious original member of the 1630-1640 puritan migration to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Cyprian's son, Simon Stevens (1677-1758) settled in Marlborough, MA; and his son Cyprian Stevens (1705-1769) first settled in Rutland MA where his son Thomas Stevens (Mar 3 1728-1798) was born and then eventually settled in Holden, MA. Thomas Stevens married Elizabeth Perkins (1720-1791) in Hardwick, Worcester County MA on Feb 14 1749 and Zillah's great grandfather, Thomas David Stevens was born in Hardwick on Mar 27 1754. It's not known why the Stevens family decided to make the trek to Nova Scotia. Hardwick had only been incorporated in 1738 and the first church gathered there in 1736. In 1755, Thomas Stevens was a member of the town's militia sent to protect the frontiers in the "French War" which had started in 1744. The history of Hardwick notes that on Mar 27 1761, Thomas Stevens sold 84 acres in the west part of the town to an Ephraim Cleveland; after which no trace of him could be found.<sup>6</sup> This was obviously Thomas' stake to set he and his family up in Nova Scotia.

At the same time in the north of Ireland, British Captain Alexander McNutt was advertising the opportunity for free land in Nova Scotia to Irish Presbyterians in the counties of Donegal, Tyrone and Londonderry. McNutt, originally from Northern Ireland, had initially been involved in recruiting Massachusetts settlers for the former Acadian lands and he obtained permission from Governor Lawrence to settle seven townships in Nova Scotia. On Apr 21 1761, he launched a campaign with an advertisement in the *Belfast New-Letter and General Advertiser* inviting "*industrious farmers and useful mechanics*" to emigrate to Nova Scotia offering 200 acres to the head of each family and 50 to each member and the promise that religious freedom was secured to "*Persons of all Perfwafions, Papifts excepted*".



According to family history, James Cooke, wife Martha and their children arrived from Ireland at Halifax aboard the *Hopewell* on Oct 9 1761 along with James' brother William Cooke and his family.<sup>7</sup> Arriving late in the year the families were forced to spend the winter at Halifax with the support of both the government and private charity. In the spring of 1762, they were provided with provisions, seed corn,

<sup>6</sup> <https://archive.org/details/historyofhardwic00paig/page/506/mode/2up?q=stevens> History of Hardwick by Lucius Paige.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/~ab443/irish.html> Some names of passengers on the Hopewell survive but Cooke is not among them.

tools and building materials and a ship to take them to Cobequid on the Minas Basin. The Cookes settled at Portapique, a village on the north shore of Cobequid Bay in Colchester County just 40km west of Truro. Their son, Ralph Cooke married and had a son, John Boyd Cooke (1789-1864) who worked as a ship sparmaker. In 1817, he married at Onslow NS Ann Mary Carr (1795-1870). Their nine children lived all their lives in Nova Scotia except son Ephraim Boyd Cook (1828-1897), father of Zillah, who would eventually move his family to British Columbia.

### **LIFE IN NOVA SCOTIA**

During the late 1800s, Londonderry NS, about 20k inland from Portapique, was a bustling mining town thanks to the Acadia Charcoal Iron Company – commonly known as Acadia Mines – which produced some of the world’s highest quality iron ore. In 1874, the mine was purchased by the Steel Company of Canada, who, over the next ten years, spent \$2.5 million on expansion including adding a 63-foot-high blast furnace. In 1875, the mine established a second operation at East Mines. Population in the Acadia Mines settlement increased by 130 percent over the next ten years. It is estimated that during its peak, approximately 1200 workers were employed at the mine.

The *1871 Census of Canada* notes that Ephraim Cook was a blacksmith so presumably he would have had lots of opportunities for employment in and around the mine. The family with son Ezra 17; daughter Annie 13; and daughter Zillah now 11, were living in Wentworth just 30km north of Londonderry, NS.

### **ZILLAH CAME WITH HER PARENTS TO NANAIMO after 1871**

Family recollection is that Ephraim and son Ezra left Nova Scotia, travelling by rail across the United States to the west coast around 1865 although they must have returned to Nova Scotia to be caught up in the *1871 Canada Census*. Mother Julia and daughter Zillah are said to have made the trip some years later. Another version of the recollection states that it was not until after his widowed mother died in 1870, that Ephraim and Julia moved their small family to British Columbia crossing the continent by train. Ephraim apparently had switched professions to become a dairy farmer and would benefit from the longer growing season in Nanaimo, BC.

### **ZILLAH MEETS ANGUS IN NANAIMO**

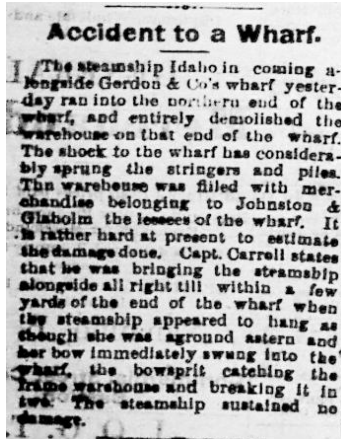
We do know that by 1881, the family was definitely reunited in British Columbia as there is a record in the *1881 Census of Canada* in Nanaimo for Ephraim Cook aged 53, Nova Scotian-born, Baptist, of Irish descent, with Julia aged 54; Ezra aged 27, farmer; and Zillah aged 20, dressmaker. Annie is absent and may have decided to remain in Nova Scotia.

In the same *1881 Census of Canada* taken in April of that year, Angus Rutherford Johnston is living in Nanaimo, occupation Merchant; age 39, born in 1842.

Angus is also ramping up his wholesale and retail business with an advertisement in the May 6 1881 *Puget Sound Weekly Argus* in Port Townsend, Washington announcing A.R. Johnston & Co. as dealers in “*Farm Produce at Gordon’s Wharf, Nanaimo*”. Gordon’s Wharf, the first wharf in Nanaimo, had officially opened on Mar 31 1867 and was named after David Gordon (1832-1893) the contractor who designed and built the structure (pictured here).



By 1881, large coal wharves dominated the downtown Nanaimo waterfront. Freight and passengers were unloaded at either Gordon’s Wharf or the Hirst Wharf at 104 Front Street built by another local entrepreneur, John Hirst. On June 21 1882, the steamer *Idaho* would cause extensive damage when it ran



into Gordon’s wharf entirely demolishing the warehouse filled with Johnston’s merchandise. The *Idaho* was a Pacific Coast Steamship Company wooden passenger and freight service vessel bound for Alaska and was stopping at Nanaimo enroute for coal. Captain Carrell stated that: “he was bringing the steamship alongside all right till within a few yards of the end of the wharf when the steamship appeared to hang as though she was aground astern and her bow immediately swang into the wharf, the bowsprit catching the frame warehouse and breaking it in two.” The steamship sustained no damage.<sup>8</sup>

On Oct 27 1881, twenty-one-year-old Zillah Cook married thirty-nine-year-old Angus Rutherford Johnston at St Andrew’s Church in Nanaimo.<sup>9</sup> They would have five children: Albert Cook Johnston born 1882; Harold Leslie

Johnston born about 1883; Kate Winnifred Johnston born 1886; Una Jessie Johnston born 1893; and Effie Muriel Johnston born 1894.

Angus and Zillah’s first child, Albert Cook Johnston, was born on Jun 28 1882 in Nanaimo but nothing more of Albert is seen after his birth. A delayed birth certificate issued in 1947 for Harold Leslie Johnston notes that he was born on May 28 1882 in Nanaimo which is an unlikely possibility given that there already is an original 1882 birth record for Albert Cook Johnston. It is more likely that Harold Leslie Johnston was born either around 1885 as would be noted on the *1891 Canada Census*; or “about 1883” as noted on his death index; or on May 28 1883 as recorded in the *1901 Canada Census*. In this delayed birth certificate for Harold, it was noted that, at the time of his birth, the family was living on Skinner Street; Angus was a merchant in wholesale groceries; and Zillah was a school teacher. The picture is of Zillah, baby Harold and her parents.



Angus, in the meantime, was expanding his business interests with applications in 1887 to purchase various parcels of land including one for 400 acres and another for 500 acres on Salt Spring Island and another for 640 acres at Otter Cove, Sayward District north of Campbell River.<sup>10</sup> On Mar 6 1883, Angus was appointed by the federal government as one of three commissioners to the new pilotage authority for the district of Nanaimo. One of the authority’s first administrative acts was to approve a set of bylaws for the guidance of pilots within the district which were certified by the Governor General on Dec 13 1883.<sup>11</sup>

The Sep 8 1888 *Londonderry Times* of Acadia Mines, Colchester County NS carried this item under Local News: “Mrs. Ephraim Cooke and daughter, Mrs. Johnson of Nanaimo, British Columbia arrived here Friday

<sup>8</sup> Nanaimo Free Press, June 21 1882, page 2

<sup>9</sup> See JPEG of Marriage Registration

<sup>10</sup> British Columbia Gazette, Sep 22 1887 and Jan 25 1887

<sup>11</sup> Canada Gazette 1883, page 907

morning (via the C.P.R.) on a visit to relatives and friends. Many of the older residents of this place will be pleased to see her amongst us.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1889, the Nanaimo Board of Trade was incorporated later to be known as the Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce. Founding members included A.R. Johnston, and his partner T. W. Glaholm. Angus also seemed to be in the quarrying business with the posting of an 1890 advertisement for: “A NUMBER OF QUARRYMEN WANTED Newcastle Quarry, Nanaimo. Current wages paid. Apply to A.R. Johnston Co. Or R. Nightingale, Supt.” Quarrying companies sometimes seem to have been formed ad hoc for specific contracts, and often it was not clear who exactly was quarrying sandstone on and around Vancouver Island.<sup>13</sup>



In Henderson’s *BC Gazetteer and Directory of 1889*, Angus and Zillah Cook Johnston appear to be still living in Nanaimo but the *1890 Directory for Nanaimo* notes that “Johnston A.R. of A.R. Johnston & Co.,” is now a resident of Victoria City. This is confirmed in *Henderson’s BC Gazetteer and Directory of 1890* for Victoria which records that Angus Rutherford Johnston and Mrs. Lilla Johnston were living on Toronto Street near Beacon Hill Park. The *1891 Census of Canada* also records that they are living in Victoria with their two children: Harold Leslie Johnston and Kate Winnifred Johnston. The newspaper advertisement is from the *Nanaimo Courier*, May 22 1889.

The possible reason for the move to Victoria was that on Nov 28 1888, Angus formed the North Pacific Canning (NPC) company along with John Alexander Carthew, cannery operator and Alexander Gilmore McCandless, Victoria businessman. In 1889, the trustees received a crown grant for 183 acres of land at a cost of \$32 and a plant was constructed near Port Edward in the Haida Gwaii about 25km south of Prince Rupert. The plant was sold in 1891 to the ABC Packing Company run by another Scotsman, Henry Ogle Bell-Irving. In 1891, the NPC company accounted for more than one quarter of British Columbia’s total salmon pack, and was the foremost packer of sockeye salmon in the world. The NPC had almost 90 years continuous salmon production and fish processing until ending in the late 1970s. Today, the plant and its outbuildings are an historic site.<sup>14</sup>



By 1893, the family appears to have moved back to Nanaimo only to be devastated on Feb 7 1893 by the birth and death of their daughter Una Jessie Johnston.

Business moved on, however, and in the Mar 24 1893 edition of the *Nanaimo Free Press*, architect John James Bastion Honeyman (1864-1934) issued a tender call for the erection of stores for A.R. Johnston &

<sup>12</sup> Source: National Archives of Canada Newspaper Archives

<sup>13</sup> Gabriola’s sandstone quarry —the earliest days by Jenni Gehlbach, Gabriola Historical & Museum Society 2009.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.northpacificcannery.ca/cannery-history/daily-life-at-the-cannery>

**To Have a Second Story.**  
A. R. Johnston & Co. have decided to make the large building on the corner of Commercial and Bastion Streets, two stories in height instead of one as called for in the contract. Mr. Honeyman, the architect is making the necessary changes in the plans.

Co at the corner of Commercial and Bastion Streets.<sup>15</sup> The original plans were for a one-story building but on May 25 1893, the architect announced that the company had decided to make it two stories. While construction was underway, the company appears to have been operating from under the Foresters' Hall at the corner of Skinner and Bastion Street. The newspaper notice is from the *Nanaimo Free Press*, May 25 1893.

Born in Glasgow on Apr 9 1864, J. J. Honeyman completed architectural studies at Heidelberg University in Germany and then returned to Glasgow in 1883 to article. His uncle, John Honeyman, was one of the most distinguished Scottish architects of the Victorian era but he never invited his nephew to article with him. As a result, in 1889, Honeyman left for Canada crossing the continent on the CPR. He first ranched near Black Creek in the Comox Valley before establishing an architectural practice in Nanaimo in 1891. Honeyman's commissions included the A.R. Johnston Block in Nanaimo, 1893, a school in Cumberland, 1895, and Nanaimo Central School, 1895-96. He moved to Rossland BC in 1897 and ultimately to Vancouver in 1901.<sup>16</sup>

What became known as the A.R. Johnston Block at 172-174 Commercial Street speaks to Nanaimo's early commercial development and is one of very few pre-1900 buildings still standing. Located at a prominent downtown intersection, the building was part of a complex that included a store, warehouse and wharf and originally backed onto Nanaimo's now infilled inner harbour. The siting underlines the historic importance of harbour access and water transportation to early merchants operating in isolated Nanaimo.

Built in 1898 to replace an earlier building at this site, the Johnston Block is a very good example of a simple, vernacular commercial building. The two storey, rear portion of the building has a stone foundation and a hip roof. The interior of the one storey front portion retains the original pressed tin ceiling. The exterior has been stuccoed but the foundation is still visible at the side and rear and is a rare local example of early stone construction.

The building has been home to several Nanaimo retail mainstays over the years including the Metropolitan, SAAN and the Red Apple the latter two being labels under the Metropolitan banner. That company was first incorporated in 1908 as F.H. Brewster & Company, and renamed Metropolitan Stores Ltd. in 1920. At its peak, Metropolitan was one of the four largest variety chain store organizations in Canada with 180 stores in all provinces and territories. The building was lovingly refurbished by Glen Saunders in the mid-1990s, retaining many of the building's historic features including its original brick walls, hardwood floors and tin ceiling and is now the "Flying Fish".



During the construction, daughter Effie Muriel Johnston was born in Nanaimo on Feb 5 1894.

The late 1890's brought some not so inconsequential news for the Johnston business. A Mrs. Hannah Smithurst from Nanaimo accidentally drowned on Nov 3 1896 while boarding the *Princess Louise* at

<sup>15</sup> Nanaimo Free Press Mar 24 1893: see JPEG of advertisement

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.michaelkluckner.com/bciw3greenwood.html>



Johnston's Wharf. The coroner's inquest ruled it accidental as a result of unprotected gang planks.<sup>17</sup> Her husband, Elijah Smithurst had just died on Sep 5 1896 from cancer and they left a 29-year-old son, Elijah.<sup>18</sup>

On July 27 1897, fifty Nanaimo coal miners left on the *Islander* for the Klondike gold rush. The mayor of the day, Joseph H Davidson, and two aldermen also joined the exodus. On Aug 26 1897 a letter was sent to A.R. Johnston from J.C. McGregor advising that all the Nanaimo Klondiker boys were well and they had reached the summit of Dyes Pass with 1800 pounds of supplies.

On Sep 20 1893, Zillah's brother, Ezra Stevens Cook married Louise McCutcheon in Nanaimo. They would have four children: Carlyle Edward Cook 1895; Frieda Lillian Cook 1897; Melville Stuart Cook 1900; and Gordon Campbell Cook 1904. Ezra was a dairyman like his father. On Feb 19 1897, Zillah's father, Ephraim Cook died at the age of 68.

On May 20 1898, Angus R Johnston, Front Street merchant, appeared on the list of persons entitled to vote in the Nanaimo City Electoral District. Presumably this was in preparation for the 1898 British Columbia general election. Until 1903, British Columbia politics were officially non-partisan and political parties were not part of the process. The designations "Government" and "Opposition" and "Independent" (and variations on these) functioned in place of parties, but they were very loose and did not represent formal coalitions but rather more alignments of support during the campaign. "Government" meant in support of the current Premier; "Opposition" meant campaigning against him, and often enough the Opposition would win and immediately become the Government. For this election, there were some candidates who had formed a party and they managed to elect Ralph Smith a coal miner from Newcastle upon Tyne now living in Nanaimo on a "Liberal-Labour" platform.

The *1901 Census of Canada* includes widow Julia Ann Cooke in Nanaimo's North Ward, living at the home of her son Ezra and daughter-in-law Louise. Angus, Zillah and their children Harold, Kate and Effie were also living in the North Ward which was essentially that portion of developed Nanaimo north of a line drawn due west from the end of Bastion and Fitzwilliam Streets. According to the 1901 *Henderson BC Gazetteer and Directory*, the Johnstons were living on Front Street while the Cooks were living at 78 Wallace Street where Ezra was still a farmer.

On Oct 29 1905, Zillah's mother, Julia Ann Cook, passed away at the age of 78. The *Nanaimo Daily News* on Monday, Oct 30 1905 reported that: *Mrs. Julia Ann Cook, widow of the late Ephraim Cook, and one of Nanaimo's oldest residents, died this morning at one o'clock at the residence of her son-in-law, Mr. A. R. Johnston, Comox Road. Cook was born in Belmont, N.S. and had resided in Nanaimo for the past twenty years. She leaves a daughter, Mrs. A. R. Johnston, a son Ezra Cook, both of this city and a niece Mrs. T. E. Atkins, of Vancouver. The funeral will take place Wednesday afternoon and friends are requested not to send flowers.*

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<sup>17</sup> [https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/assets/Coroners\\_Index\\_before\\_1918.pdf](https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/assets/Coroners_Index_before_1918.pdf) Series GR-2935 Container B16919

<sup>18</sup> [004437584\\_02716.jpg](#) & [004437584\\_02721.jpg](#)

In 1907, Nanaimo was still a small mining town with a population around 4,000. The community was aptly described by Joseph Nicholson Kneen (1883-1967) founder and president of Kneen's Builder Supplies. He arrived in Nanaimo from England's Lake District via Edmonton in August of that year.<sup>19</sup>

*I arrived aboard the small CPR SS Joan, tied up at the wharf down below the old Post Office, now a parking lot for the new Post Office. This wharf had been built by a man by the name of Gordon, I don't know the*



*date but it is in the old map of mine of 1891. Then owned by A.R. Johnston. Later the CPR bought it. I think about 1910. CPR did not have no wharf until this time. We walk up a very steep hill to Front Street and on the left is the old jail with white washed fence around it [mostly likely the Hudson Bay Co.'s "Old Stone House" converted into the city jail in 1875].<sup>20</sup> On the right. the old Post Office, now a parking lot for the new Post Office. Going north on our left a rock bluff then a small brick building, more rock bluff, three old Hudson's Bay Houses standing on top*

*of it. Then the Provincial Court House. Next the Globe Hotel. On our right stretching from the old Post Office north about 800 feet, vacant lots belonging to the Western Fuel Company. Well, it had a bandstand and several benches which was where you would meet your friends on a fine summer evening if they were not beer drinkers and watch the Indians paddling and racing their canoes back and forth.*



*It was a young man's town--29 hotels, 2 boarding houses with anywhere from 16 to 20 boarders each. I should say that 75% of the homes were south of Albert Street, this is the old part of the Town, not changed very much. You can tell by the style of the houses. By 1910, the coal company started to expand their operation. The city was also beginning to grow up.*

*Our sidewalks were all wood and very fortunate that the young ladies did not have spike heels in those days. By the end of 1911 or early 1912, they had been replaced by concrete. A little later came along the sewers, followed by the paving of Comox Road from the corner of Wallace Street to Front Street, Church Street, Commercial Street, Victoria Crescent, Winfield Crescent, Nicol Street to the corner of Prideaux Street. Wallace Street from Comox Street to Albert Street was also paved; and one block on Machleary Street from Fitzwilliam Street to Franklyn Street.*

*There was a bridge between the corners now occupied by the Jean Burns Block and the Lindsay Block. In fact, the stonework of an old stone country-type bridge still rests between Commercial Street somewhere around Nash Hardware or the B.C. Power Commission.*

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.nanaimoarchives.ca/transcripts-recordings/historical-transcripts/kneen-joseph-family-history/>

Interview with Joseph K. Kneen age 84, died November 5th, 1967 - arrived in Nanaimo August, 1907. Joseph's brother, Harold Kneen would eventually marry the first wife of Harold Johnston.

<sup>20</sup> BC Archives photos: #B02508, Nanaimo Harbour (and jail) & #B07244, Nanaimo from the harbour: Steamer Joan starting her daily run

*Now, we turn onto Comox Road, and go west. On our right, a foundry, now a machine shop. On our left, the Newcastle Hotel, and one old house. Now, we turn north on Bridge Street, on our right, a small sawmill, on our left, the gasworks. Now we are on the wood bridge of the Millstone River, looking west up the river, the old Electric Light plant. Now, we are on Stewart Avenue, still going north, we come to First Street, now Dawes Street.*

*Most of the people lived on this side of the [Millstream] bridge, with the “Nobs” beyond it and below Departure Bay Road. Hogan’s store was out of town then and Coburn’s Sawmill was where the Arena stands today. At that time, Terminal Avenue was under water and at high tide, Indians would throw a log across to reach the foundry.*

On April 12 1909, the corner of Bastion and Commercial streets was the scene of a big cave in. Angus made a presentation to City Council on Apr 13 1909 noting that the cause was a main from the city’s water system flooding the street next to his property. The result was the ground caving in on the dividing line between the street and the store building and the building was now hanging on by a thread. Some 200 cubic yards of earth would be required to fill the hole which was partly on the street and partly under the building and another 40 – 50 tons of rock to build a retaining wall. Angus offered to pay one half the cost. Council voted to put the matter in the hands of the city’s Street Committee for immediate action.<sup>21</sup>

On Mar 4 1910, a big headline in the *Nanaimo Free Press* announced that A.R. Johnston’s wharf had been purchased by the Canadian Pacific Railway.<sup>22</sup> Speculation was rampant as to what this would mean for the future of Nanaimo as a hub and harbour city or would Nanoose with its good harbour and closer distance to Vancouver fit better in a future railway system. Consensus was that the sale was good for Nanaimo and that “people could consider their holdings increased fifty per cent by the news.”

Then, on Dec 30 1910, Angus passed away quite suddenly in Nanaimo at the age of 69. For the previous week he had complained of not feeling well and was troubled with occasional dizzy spells, but had lost none of his usual energy and cheerfulness.<sup>23</sup> As a result, his sudden death came as a terrible shock to his family and the entire community as the news spread rapidly through town. The *Nanaimo Free Press* noted that: “he was an influential man in the community and held progressive ideas. His business was conducted on progressive lines and he was always more than willing to keep abreast of modern improvements.” His had been a most unusual life, his early years replete with adventures and experiences of an extraordinary nature and character following which he became a most efficient and capable business man.<sup>24</sup> The family home was on Comox Road at the corner of Prideaux and it was noted that son Harold was living in Vancouver; daughter Kate was studying in Germany; and daughter Effie was residing in Nanaimo. Angus is buried in the Nanaimo Municipal Cemetery.



<sup>21</sup> Nanaimo Free Press April 14 1909 <https://viurrspace.ca/bitstream/handle/10613/9162/Apr14-1909.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>22</sup> Nanaimo Free Press March 4 1910 <file:///C:/Users/Owner/Downloads/Mar04-1910.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Nanaimo Free Press Dec 31 1910 <file:///C:/Users/Owner/Downloads/Dec31-1910.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://open.library.ubc.ca/viewer/bcbooks/1.0356573#p1161z-3r0f:angus%20johnston> Howay F.W. & Scholefield E.O.S. British Columbia from the earliest times to the present. Biographical. Volume III, The SJ Clarke Publishing Company 1914 Vol. 3 p.1154

In the *1911 Census of Canada*, widow Zillah Johnston is still living on Comox Road in Nanaimo. Zillah's brother Ezra Cook is also still living in Nanaimo in the *1911 Census of Canada*. He seems to have given up the farm and is now working in the federal government for customs.

By 1912 according to the *Henderson Greater Victoria City Directory* for Nanaimo, Harold Johnston has officially taken over as Managing Director of A.R Johnston & Co Ltd. He is currently living on Chapel Street. On Mar 22 1912, A.R. Johnston & Co is assessed for the paving of Bastion Street including two properties: A.R. Johnston & Co at 1 Bastion and Johnston & Glaholm at 10 Bastion; and three lots on Commercial Street.<sup>25</sup>

Harold Johnston was a member of the Board of Trade which, at the time, was contemplating inviting a Dr Elliot S Rowe, secretary of the Vancouver Tourist Association to pay a visit to Nanaimo and address the citizens on the subject of "Publicity". "Much talk of a desultory nature followed, the general feeling being that publicity was hardly the province of a Board of Trade. It was suggested that the younger men of Nanaimo should interview the citizens generally and take such matters on their own shoulders. The ultimate vote, however, was in favour of inviting Dr Rowe.

Then, at the end of 1912, it appears that Ezra Cook, brother of Zillah, died in Los Angeles on Dec 29. There is no information about what he was doing in California although it could perhaps be related to his job with federal customs. He was 59 years old.<sup>26</sup> His oldest son, Dr. Carlyle Cook, now a dentist, would marry Elizabeth Hill Gardener in Nanaimo on Oct 11 1920. Daughter Frieda Cook, married John Chandos Dewdney Yale Simpson on Sep 30 1930 in Nanaimo. Son Melville Cook married Mary Kathleen Gray on Jul 4 1931 in Nanaimo; and son Gordon Cook married Isabelle Marwick on Apr 27 1937 also in Nanaimo. Ezra's wife, Louisa McCutcheon died Feb 26 1936.

**This is also the year that Zillah Johnston takes possession of a new house at 36 Stewart Avenue.** In 1912, a lot at the corner of Stewart Avenue and Bryden Streets was going for \$2000.<sup>27</sup>

On Jul 8 1911, Zillah had announced in the *Nanaimo Free Press* a two-day auction of all of her "valuable household effects" at her current home on the corner of Comox Road and Prideaux Streets. Everything including furniture, rugs, mattresses, table linen, silverware, wall clocks and books was expected to be sold with absolutely no reserve bids.<sup>28</sup> It would obviously take some time before her new home was ready since on Oct 24 1912, Zillah advertised in the *Nanaimo Free Press* for a "servant girl" to apply between the hours of 1 and 3 to Mrs. A.R Johnston at 115 Wallace Street. By Aug 24 1915, Zillah was advertising the rental of her furnished house on Stewart Avenue for the winter months. There is no indication where she might have gone.

By the time of the *1913 Henderson's Greater Victoria City Directory*, Harold Johnston has moved into the new house at 36 Stewart Avenue with his mother. That same year, daughter Kate Johnston married Robert Smith. Harold Johnston continues to be Managing Director of A.R. Johnston Co., Ltd until 1918, when both he and the company disappear from the Nanaimo city directory. It is not known who

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<sup>25</sup> Nanaimo Free Press March 22 1912 (pdf file)

<sup>26</sup> Los Angeles Times: Thursday, January 2, 1913: COOK. In the city, December, Ezra S. Cook. Funeral from Pierce Bros. And Co.'s chapel Friday, January 3, at 10 a.m.

<sup>27</sup> Nanaimo Free Press Sep 12 1912 page 4 (pdf file)

<sup>28</sup> Nanaimo Free Press Jul 8 1911 (pdf file)

subsequently purchased either the property or the company. By 1934, the building had become a Metropolitan store until 1984; then a Saan Store from 1985 to 1992; then a Red Apple Clearance Centre from 1993 to 1996 after which it stood vacant until 2003 when businessman Glen Saunders renovated the building and created Flying Fish.

On Sep 4 1920, Harold Leslie Johnson married Jessie Dunbar in Comox. Jessie was a nurse who had been occupying the position as Lady Superintendent of the Campbell River Hospital. Apparently, during the past year, Harold had been engaged in the lumber business with headquarters at Vancouver.

Zillah appears to have missed the 1921 *Canada Census* and moved out of the house at 36 Stewart Avenue prior to that event. She most likely relocated to Vancouver to be with her daughter as she died there on Jan 25 1922. Zillah Cook Johnston was buried in Nanaimo on Jan 28 1922.

Vancouver Province: Friday Jan 27 1922: *The funeral of Mrs. Zillah Johnston, widow of Angus Rutherford Johnston of Nanaimo, will take place on Saturday in Nanaimo. She died here on Wednesday at the age of 61 at the home of her son-in-law, Mr. Robert Smith, 1529 Comox Street, Vancouver.*

It would appear that none of the Johnston children or grandchildren had or received any interest in the house at 36 Stewart Avenue in Nanaimo after Zillah's death in 1922.

## 2. WASHINGTON EVERITT WILKS & MURIEL ALISON MAY HUDSON 1914-1921

Washington Everitt Wilks was born about 1886 in Wood Green, Middlesex, England the son of Washington Fabian Wilks (1855-1939) and Alice Emma Turnbull (1855-1928). They had married in 1881 in England. An older daughter, Marjorie Alice Wilks (1883-1958) became an actress under the name of Madge Fabian. Washington Everitt Wilks' grandmother, Cecilia Wilks widowed by 1871, had been the principal of a lady's school in Middlesex and his father had started clerking at a bank at the age of 15.

Washington entered medical school in 1903 at the Birkbeck Institute in London and interned at Charing Cross Hospital. In 1911, he married Muriel Alison May Hudson at St Stephen in Paddington, Westminster, England; and they emigrated to Canada in 1912.

On Apr 22 1913, a meeting of members of the Western Fuel Corporation Miner's Medical Fund was held to consider applications for the position of doctor. They had received upwards of thirty applications for the position of which three were to be considered at the meeting: Dr McLauchlan of Vancouver; Dr W. E. Wilks of Victoria; and Dr G. T Wilson of New Westminster. Dr Wilks and Dr Wilson were chosen to have their names submitted for ultimate appointment to a pithead ballot on May 1 1913. Presumably Wilks won the ballot and was able to set up a secure practice in Nanaimo. His office, in the 1914 *Henderson's Greater Victoria City Directory* is at 3



Commercial Street. Washington was elected again in 1915 as the “mine physician for the Vancouver-Nanaimo mines (Jingle Pot)”.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Wilks were in Nanaimo by 1914, it isn't until *1920 Wrigley's British Columbia Directory* that their residential address is confirmed to be 36 Stewart Avenue. In the *1921 Canada Census*, Washington is definitely renting the house at 36 Stewart.

In 1916, Washington's parents had also emigrated to Canada landing at Quebec and ending up entering Vancouver Island via Victoria in April 1917. In the *1921 Canada Census* they were living at 280 Fourth Street in Nanaimo (now Rosehill?). According to landing papers, his father was an accountant and had something to do with the Admiralty Naval Store which is how it was fashioned in the *1911 England Census*.

Muriel Wilks was an avid tennis player and in March 1916 was elected as an officer of the Nanaimo Tennis Club.<sup>30</sup> In July 1921, Washington Wilks was elected as a director of the Nanaimo Hospital for a three-year term.

On Oct 17 1921, elections were again held for a Western Fuel Company mine doctor. There were 33 applications for the position but only six made it to the ballot. The voting results were: Dr Ingham, Nanaimo, 90; Dr Hall, Vancouver, 75; Dr Lane, Nanaimo, 72; Dr McIntyre, Nanaimo, 65; Dr Moore, Victoria, 61; and Dr Wilks, Nanaimo, 53.<sup>31</sup> It would appear that Dr Wilks' time as a mine physician had come to an end and he would soon move to Vancouver. His parents remained in Nanaimo where his mother, Alice Wilks died on May 31 1928 at the age of 73. His father, Washington Fabian Wilks, died in South Africa in 1939.



One of the most curious features of Dr Wilks is his professed religion as a “Theosophist”. The Theosophical Society whose purpose was to investigate psychic phenomena was organized in 1875 under the leadership of a Colonel Henry S Olcott of New York. Olcott's plan was to organize a Society of occultists and begin to collect and diffuse information concerning “those secret laws of nature which were so familiar to the Chaldeans and Egyptians, but are totally unknown by our modern world of science.”<sup>32</sup>

Among Theosophists, Wilkes was a traditionalist in that he grounded his spiritual search on the revelations of Helen Blavatsky, a Russian countess who had launched the international Theosophical movement in the 1870's. None of the controversy around Blavatsky such as the charges that she was a fraud and a charlatan affected the lifelong excitement that Wilks felt in her writings about the ancient wisdom of Egypt and India. The society appealed to him because it was open to anyone of any creed, race, sex, caste or colour and because it espoused no doctrine.<sup>33</sup>

By 1929, Dr Wilks was an officer of the Theosophical Society in Canada, which had formed in 1919 and he represented the Orpheus Lodge in Vancouver. He ran the Orpheus Lodge and his medical practice from the same address in the Medical Dental Building on Georgia Street across from the Hotel Vancouver. Wilks

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<sup>29</sup> The Nanaimo Free Press, Oct 8 1915

<sup>30</sup> The Nanaimo Free Press, March 24 1916

<sup>31</sup> Harbour City: Nanaimo in Transition, 1920-1967 by Jan Peterson, page 34

<sup>32</sup> [http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/canadian\\_theosophist/canadian\\_theosophist\\_v10\\_1929-30.pdf](http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/canadian_theosophist/canadian_theosophist_v10_1929-30.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Jewels of the Qila: The Remarkable Story of an Indo-Canadian Family by Hugh J.M. Johnston, page 131

notes that: "The Orpheus Lodge was extremely fortunate last month in having a visit from Mr. Nojogen Lenzaki, a Japanese Buddhist of the Zen school. ...His interpretation of Buddhism carried conviction, he has that rare thing, a serene view of life which the Buddhist teaching brings to those who have the courage to follow it unconditionally." As Wilks wrote in 1926: "...it is all important to concentrate a strong united effort to make very clear what Theosophy is, and to dissociate the original Teaching from the undignified and debasing superstitions which have been allowed to cloud and obscure the Great Message."<sup>34</sup>

Muriel Allison May Wilks died Mar 16 1931 in Vancouver at the age of 47. Dr Wilks died in Vancouver on Jan 22 1969 at the age of 83. He had retired only two years previously and was survived by his sons, Jack and Derek Wilks.

### **3. FRANK S CUNLIFFE & AGNES FORMAN NICOL: 1925- 1958**

Frank Stigant Cunliffe was born Jul 19 1893 in Kettering, Northampton, England the son of Joseph Cunliffe (1862-1928) born in Lancashire and Edith Moore (1863-1943) born in Chatham, Kent. His parents had married on May 21 1890 at Kingston Hill, St Paul, Surrey, England. They had three other children: Sydney Allred Cunliffe, baptised May 24 1891; Edith Mary born April 22 1903; and Muriel Annie baptized Feb 7 1904 all in England.

Father, Joseph Cunliffe, was a journeyman working at various jobs including as a fitter, a brickworks manager and, as noted in the *1891 Census of England*, a contractor's agent.

In the *1901 Census of England*, Frank was 7 years old living in Kettering with his parents, Joseph, 39, a brickworks worker; Edith, 37; siblings Sidney A, 10; Edith M, 6; grandmother Anne Moore, 62; and aunt Ada H Moore, 26.

Joseph Cunliffe, age 45, brickmaker, and his two sons, Sydney age 16, joiner, and Frank, age 13, schoolboy, arrived at St John NB on the *Empress of Ireland* from Liverpool, Apr 13 1907 headed for Vancouver. Edith Moore Cunliffe, at age 45, followed a year later with daughters Muriel, 4, and Edith, 10, arriving at Montreal on Jun 19 1908 from Liverpool aboard the *Empress of Ireland*. They were booked on the CPR to Vancouver.

In the *1911 Canada Census*, the Cunliffe family is now all living in Vancouver and Frank is 17 years old and seems to be a student but also working in an office. Joseph is 48 and works as a superintendent for the city; Edith is 48; Sydney is 20 and working as an engineer; Edith is 16 and Muriel is 7.

In 1916, Frank was called to the BC bar after articling with F G T Lucas & E A Lucas in Vancouver. At the time, he was living with his parents at 1849 Creelman, Vancouver. Father, Joseph Cunliffe was a superintendent of sewer construction with the city.

That same year, Frank married Agnes "Nan" Forman Nicol on Oct 14 1916 at St Mark's Church in Kitsilano, Vancouver. Agnes Forman Nicol was born Sep 24 1891 at Renfrew, Scotland just west of Glasgow the daughter of David Nicol (1857-1896) and Isabella Findley Donaldson (1867-1918). They had married in 1888 at Carriden just west of Edinburgh and had two daughters before Agnes: Mary Nicol in 1885 and Isabella Nicol in 1890. David Nicol was the son of Thomas Nicol (1816-1863) and Agnes Forman (1820-

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<sup>34</sup> The Canadian Theosophist, 1926, page 52, contribution from Dr W.E. Wilks, 736 Granville Street, Vancouver BC.

1901). Isabella was the daughter of John G Donaldson born 1838 and Isabella Findley born 1840. They had married on Dec 31 1857 at Carriden, Scotland.

Unfortunately, David Nicol died in 1892 in Renfrew at the age of 35. In 1896, Isabella Donaldson Nicol married Gibraltar-born John McLachlin (1872-1910) at Dennistoun in Glasgow.

In the *1901 Scotland Census*, Agnes is 9 years old and staying at the home of an aunt, Ann Wood Nicol Hutton, in Edinburgh. The rest of her family are at New Monkland Lancashire just east of Glasgow. John McLachlan, 29, is a grocer's salesman and he and Isabella have a 3-year-old daughter, Helen (Nellie) along with Isabella's other daughters Mary Nicol, 17, working as a dressmaker and Isabella Nicol 11, who is still at school.

Between 1905 and 1908, the family emigrated to Vancouver. On Sept 16 1905, a John McLauchlin, age 45, was probably the first to arrive at Victoria aboard the *Whatcom* from Seattle. On Oct 21 1907, Mary Nicol which could be Agnes' sister arrived at Montreal aboard the *Athenia*. She was headed for Vancouver and gave her profession as machinist. Then on Apr 2 1908, Isabella McLachlan arrived aboard the *Cassandra* at St John NB with four daughters: Isabella, 19, a dressmaker; Agnes 16, a milliner; Nellie 10, and Anna 4. They were going on to Montreal with an ultimate destination of Vancouver.

Unfortunately, John McLauchlin died on Apr 4 1910 in Vancouver. Then, on Nov 15 1918, Agnes's mother, Isabella Donaldson Nicol McLauchlin died, also in Vancouver.

Frank and "Nan" moved to Nanaimo probably just after her mother's death and first lived at 450 Comox Road. In the *1921 Canadian Census*, Frank, a barrister, and Agnes are living at 450 Comox Road with daughter Marguerite Nicol Cunliffe age 3. On Sep 10 1924, they would have another child, Donald Moore Cunliffe who also became a barrister. They acquired 36 Stewart Avenue about 1925 and Frank would spend the rest of his life there.

Frank emersed himself totally in Nanaimo's business community. He was a past president of the Nanaimo Rotary Club, the Nanaimo Community Hotel Association and the Nanaimo Bar Association and active in the Conservative Party as well as being a candidate in the 1940 election. He was also a member of the Ashlar Lodge, the Nanaimo Golf Club and the English-Speaking Union.

He was president of the Associated Boards of Trade of Vancouver Island and in July 1926 chaired the annual convention of the Boards of Trades in Port Alberni. The convention addressed issues related to the island coal trade; salmon hatcheries; and resolutions urging the government to take action to conserve Strathcona Park.<sup>35</sup>

As president of the Nanaimo Community Hotel Association for twenty years starting in 1926, Frank was one of those businessmen instrumental in conceiving and financing the Malaspina Hotel. The Board of Directors consisted of people from a variety of occupations such as a merchant, a car dealer, a lumberman, a druggist, a barrister, and a sanitary engineer, with the sole purpose of raising money to build a modern hotel that would help advance and promote Nanaimo. In addition to providing a first-class hotel to the growing tourist trade, the new hotel had a convention centre



*Frank Cunliffe*  
1926-27

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<sup>35</sup> The Cumberland Islander, Friday July 16 1926



for club and organization meetings and served as a social hub in the community. He was also President of the Nanaimo Rotary Club the year the hotel opened on July 30, 1927.

Nan Cunliffe was also active in community affairs being a member of the I.O.D.E Bastion Chapter, O.E.S. Nanaimo chapter, Nanaimo Women's Musical Club; Nanaimo Golf Club; and the Rotary Ann's of the Nanaimo Rotary Club as well as serving as secretary to St Andrew's Wesley United Church.



March 7, 1930: Rotaryannies Toy Band, Rotary Club of Nanaimo  
Back Row L to R; Mrs. Grey, Adie Dunsmore, Mrs. Filmer, Ann Ormond, Mrs. Bierce, Mrs. Barsby, Dorothy Dickinson, Gertrude Dean, Mrs. Murphy, Bett Cowman, Mrs. Browne, Front L to R; Mrs. Thorneycroft, Mrs. Gould, Mrs. Boole, Mrs. Clements, Miss Grey, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Partington, Mrs. Hitchcox. On Floor; Nan Cunliffe, Elsie Mitchell.

In May 1928, Frank, who was also a member of the Nanaimo Golf Club, was playing a round with F.C. Grant manager of the Bank of Commerce when he got a hole-in-one on the 5<sup>th</sup> hole.

On Sep 3 1928, Joseph Cunliffe, father of Frank died in Vancouver. He was employed by the Point Grey municipal board of works and had resided in Vancouver for 21 years.

Frank Cunliffe was one of Vancouver Island's best-known lawyers and public figures and handled many of the Island's prominent criminal and civil cases and was distinguished for his Court of Appeal work. One of his most notorious clients was Edward Arthur Wilson otherwise known as Brother XII.

Wilson was a clerk in the Dominion Express office on Government Street in Victoria BC around 1912. He was a "smooth talker" who claimed he was the son of an Anglican missionary and an East Indian princess and that he had served his time as an apprentice in a British navy windjammer. Even in those days it appears that he envisaged a greater destiny for himself than that of a future chief clerk. His landlady, Peggy Reynolds, found his room frequently littered with tracts of the Theosophical Society and with scribblings about the stars. Shortly before World War I, he quit his job. He told Mrs. Reynolds that he was going away to sea but that one day he would return to Victoria with a "new dispensation."

During WWI he served in the British merchant marine and after the war stayed several years in Italy, studying theosophy and other occult religions with a group of exiled cultists. There he became converted — or so he was to say — to the doctrine of reincarnation and to the belief that, within a measurable time, the planet Aquarius, the eleventh sign of the Zodiac, would collide with the earth and destroy all mankind, except for a chosen few.

Wilson then conceived the idea of passing himself off as the earthly representative of a supernatural group he called the "Chela." This, like the Zodiac, had twelve members who, except for Wilson, floated about in space or the "Outer World." As Brother 12, he explained that his mission was to found an earthly refuge for "a chosen few" against the oncoming doom. There, to make themselves worthy of their trust, the select few would follow "The Three Truths" as set forth in Wilson's privately printed book. These were: Work, Order and Obedience — obedience, of course, to Brother 12.

Wilson was adept at separating rich people, especially women, from their money and by 1927, he was able to establish the Aquarian Foundation with headquarters at Cedar-by-the-Sea just south of Nanaimo. Ultimately, he was able to purchase the de Courcy Islands, off shore from Cedar-by-the-Sea.

In the fall of 1928, Brother XII was brought to court on two charges: embezzling \$13000 from the foundation as claimed by secretary, Robert England; and secondly, in conjunction with England rape, assault, perjury, opium smuggling, and the sexual abuse of a 10-year-old girl. The day before the preliminary hearing began, England disappeared, never to be seen again. Frank Cunliffe was representing Wilson. When the proceedings were brought to order, England's lawyer, Thomas Morton, suddenly collapsed on the bench and others collapsed on the floor. The magistrate was so disturbed that he adjourned the court. There was speculation that Brother XII had hypnotized the people. The jury returned a verdict of "no case" and Wilson was a free man. Picture is of Wilson, with beard, and some of his followers.



In 1933, Mary Connelly, who had originally given that \$13000 to Wilson as part of a \$25000 donation, fell out of favour with Brother XII when she lost all her money in the 1929 crash. She subsequently entered a suit against some of Wilson's cohorts to recover some of her money. In this case, Mary was represented by Victor Harrison while Frank Cunliffe continued to represent Wilson. Mary was awarded the money she had advanced as well as \$10,000 in damages and 400 acres on Valdes Island but, as Victor Harrison recall, she said: "if the Brother would only come back and be his old self again we would all join right in."<sup>36</sup> Brother XII apparently died in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, on Nov 7 1934. Frank Cunliffe's son is not convinced and tells a story about how his father and their family travelled to San Francisco two years after Wilson's reported death to give a large sum of money to a man dressed all in white on a ship. Don Cunliffe further maintains that Wilson even called his father a year later from Gibraltar.<sup>37</sup> It's curious that at least two residents of this house, Frank Cunliffe and Dr Washington Wilks had an association with theosophy. Brother XII had joined the American section of the Theosophical Society in 1912.

On Apr 1 1943, Frank's mother, Edith Cunliffe, died. She had been living in Kelowna with her daughter Muriel.

In 1945, Frank, a former Conservative candidate himself who did not want to run again was successful in getting Major General George Pearkes elected. It had been 10 years since the Conservatives had been in power and 5 years since the last election. Pearkes won but the Conservatives didn't. Pearkes would eventually support Diefenbaker as the new leader of the party in 1956 and became Minister of Defence when the Conservatives finally won in 1957.

In 1947, some 30 union members went on strike in a dispute with the Imperial Laundry Company. The workers had walked out in protest against dismissal of two women employees. The BC government appointed Frank as special prosecutor in the case to see what action was deemed fit under the provisions

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<sup>36</sup> Harbour city: Nanaimo in Transition, 1920-1967 by Jan Peterson, page 78

<sup>37</sup> Nanaimo Daily News, Friday, October 16 2015, page 4

of the recently passed Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration act prohibiting walkouts called without the holding of a government supervised strike ballot. Cunliffe's position was that the union members participated in a strike before the new act's conciliation procedure had been complied with and as a result there were penalties for both union officers and members who participated in an illegal strike. The outcome of the dispute is not known.

In 1948, Mladen Giunio-Zorkin, a Croatian lawyer who had settled in Nanaimo was accused, in writing, by a fellow Croatian, Mirko Vitkovich who had served for five years in the Army in Europe, of being politically involved with Ustasa, a Croatian organization that had strongly supported Hitler. Zorkin who was forthrightly anti-communist didn't complain about the document but the BC Attorney General immediately charged Vitkovich with criminal libel. Frank Cunliffe was the prosecutor in this case with John Stanton and John Burton as lawyers for the defendant. The defence's case was extremely weak and provided no verification of the claims or witnesses. Vitkovich was sentenced to 6 months in jail for his actions.

Defence lawyer Stanton maintains that he always had an uneasy feeling about the Vitkovich case and in particular, the court hearing and the events that preceded it. "Some doubts about it kept arising but I could never pin them down. All I could say to myself was that the case did not "smell" right. Not until 1981 did I find out why. I was doing research at the British Columbia Provincial Archives in Victoria. There I was given the Attorney General's file for the Vitkovich case, and I read it carefully. In the correspondence section I found two letters written before the trial by Judge Manson in Vancouver to prosecutor Cunliffe in Nanaimo. For his part, Cunliffe sent four letters to the judge. The tenor of this correspondence is clear: Judge and prosecutor were speculating on what my defences might be and how to defeat them. In case the reader thinks I am exaggerating this instance of judicial meddling I reproduce all six letters in Appendix 2, which I call "Dear Frank and Dear Alex." Victory for Zorkin and defeat for Vitkovich seemed very important for Manson and Cunliffe." Stanton speculates that the American government may have had some influence in the outcome.<sup>38</sup>

The Cunliffe's continued to live at 36 Stewart until Frank died March 31 1955 at the age of 61 following an illness of several months and a heart attack. He was survived by his wife Agnes (Nan) Cunliffe; son Donald who had been associated with his father's law practice in

Ladies Nite, 1954  
Costume Party, Plaza  
Ballroom.  
L to R; Helen Jones, Joan  
Muir, Gladys Fletcher,  
Sue Horman, Kay  
Martin, Nan Cunliffe,  
Eileen Cunliffe, Anne  
Hana, Hazel Addison.



Nanaimo; a daughter, Mrs. E. A. Riddell, in Vancouver; three grandchildren and a sister, Miss Muriel Cunliffe. At the time of his death, Mr. Cunliffe who served many years as crown counsel in Nanaimo Supreme Court was planning a trip to London, where he was to sit in at an Empire Bar meeting. On Sep 6 1969, Nan Cunliffe died suddenly in Vancouver where she had moved to in 1958. She was 77.

<sup>38</sup> My Past is Now: Further Memoirs of a Labour Lawyer by John Stanton 1994

[https://www.aupress.ca/app/uploads/cclh07\\_99Z\\_Stanton\\_1994-My\\_Past\\_Is\\_Now.pdf](https://www.aupress.ca/app/uploads/cclh07_99Z_Stanton_1994-My_Past_Is_Now.pdf)