Highland Artists: Part III

PATRICK POTHIER

in conversation with Thelma Fayle

The next time you see Sarah McLachlan singing, take a close look around the keys on the neck of her guitar. If you are lucky, you might see the fine craftsmanship of Patrick Pothier. Patrick is a talented artist, singer, guitarist, designer of spectacular homes who has lived in the Highlands for 26 years. He makes intricate and delicate shell inlays on rare, hand crafted guitars. Sarah owns two pieces of his work. One is designed with an inlay of a sandhill crane, the other with a ladyslipper, the beautiful calypso orchid that grows here in the Highlands. The photos will give you a sense of something I find difficult to describe. His work is rare and unusual and beautiful.

Thelma: I wanted to interview you the moment I heard you sing at the party to honour Bob McMinn. You warmed up the entire audience with your cozy song about having tea together. I had no idea that you had so many other artistic talents aside from singing. Tell me about the roots of your talents.

Patrick: I come from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. When I was a kid it was known as 'the gateway to Nova Scotia' because the Boston boat would come into town once a week. It was a big event and most of the town would be there to welcome the boat that would stay overnight.

Dad was a builder who liked to sing and play the ukelele and the banjo. I remember as an eight year old, watching him build things. He was a talented man. Mom sang a lot while she was busy raising nine kids. We were, and are, a close family. I am looking forward to having my brothers and sisters come to Victoria this summer for a family reunion. I expect it will be great. As teenagers, my brother and I had a rock band called The Mystics. It went on for years while I worked as a plumber and a heating technician after high school. We only stopped playing together when I decided to go off to Art College in Halifax. The Nova Scotia College of Art was a great school. My first two years were "old school", a program unchanged in 150 years. We used charcoal on unprinted newsprint, had life models, and every morning we had drawing class—even Saturdays. I felt a sense of belonging, of being in the right place, that I had never felt in school until that time. It was a four year program, and in my first year, eighty people made up the whole student body. About half of those made it through to the end. At the start of the second two years, the school had been taken over by the New York Design Artists—people who came out of the Andy Warhol school of thought. The college was totally transformed. Conceptual art was popular.

Peter Bennett

Interior view of Saltspring Island house designed by Patrick & featured in Harrowsmith magazine

Thelma: What is conceptual art?

Patrick: Let me give you an example. Four blocks of ice; the first block of ice is carved into the letter 'M'. The second one 'E', then 'L',and 'T'. Each block was put into the water in Halifax Harbour so that you could read the word 'MELT'. Everybody stayed and watched it and drank beer while it melted. Conceptual art.

Thelma: So the school initially introduced you to traditional art, and then later to conceptual art.

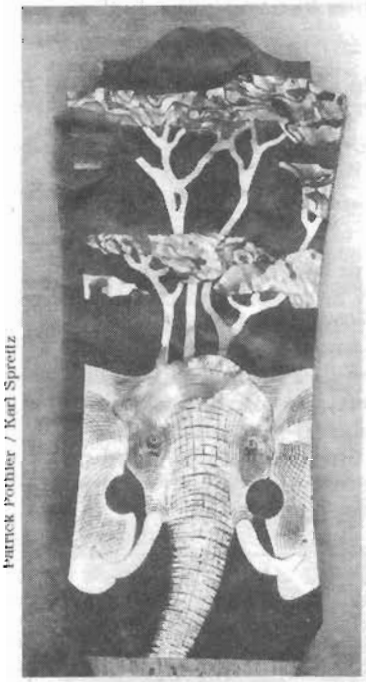
Patrick: Right. I enjoyed the old stuff, but the new was interesting too. It was a wonderful mix. The school went through some growing pains in its faculty, but I think we students got the best of both worlds.

Thelma: It sounds like you were having fun.

Patrick: I had some good times. Around then, I joined a band called The Axmen. I was lead guitar and back-up singer and it helped pay my way through college, along with a couple of other part-time jobs. I was also a calligrapher with the Ross Farm Nova Scotia Museum. I was hired to create the signage for all of the museum pieces in the new museum.

Thelma: What did you do when you finished college?

Patrick: I got the job I wanted right away. I couldn't believe it. It was a serendipitous thing. I went to the place where I thought I wanted to work—the public relations department of the Nova Scotia Power Commission. I arrived without my portfolio. I intended to find out what they were looking for before I brought it in. The fellow I spoke to, took a book out of his desk drawer and said , "this is the kind of thing we are looking for." He was very clear about what he wanted. As it turned out, in the summer of our final year, a fellow student and I had been commissioned by the Halifax Industrial Commission to produce the very book he was showing me. I opened the book and was able to show him my work. He hired me on the spot.



Patrick Pothier / Karl Spreitz

Image of elephant & vine engraved in shell.

Thelma: You couldn't have been luckier.

Patrick: Well, what seemed like an ideal situation turned out to be not so. I couldn't handle the job at all. I just didn't like it. I had to wear a suit and tie and my work went through committee process. It really wasn't me. I had to get away, so I left. I jumped on my bicycle and rode across Canada and came to Victoria.

Thelma: Why Victoria?

Patrick: One summer before I graduated, I hitch-hiked across Canada with a college buddy. I loved Victoria. So when I didn't like the job I decided to travel towards Victoria with a plan to travel through the States from here. But I never left. I met great people at a party on my first day here, many of whom are still friends. Someone invited me to a nudist colony up around Long Beach. It took me two days to get my clothes off, but then I settled in and met more great people. A friend asked me if I would be interested in helping to build a log house in Stoke. That winter I found myself alone at this little cabin. Just me and the deer and a cat and my guitar all winter long. I continued to work. It was idyllic.

Thelma: Were you lonely?

Patrick: Not at all. It was a great winter. I decided to retrain my right hand for classical guitar, and I worked away at it. I had done two years of guitar on television as part of a program called "Roundabout" back in Halifax, so I had some old playing style habits to break. It was a big job since it was a totally different way of playing. I've stayed with classical guitar ever since.

Thelma: When did you fall in love?

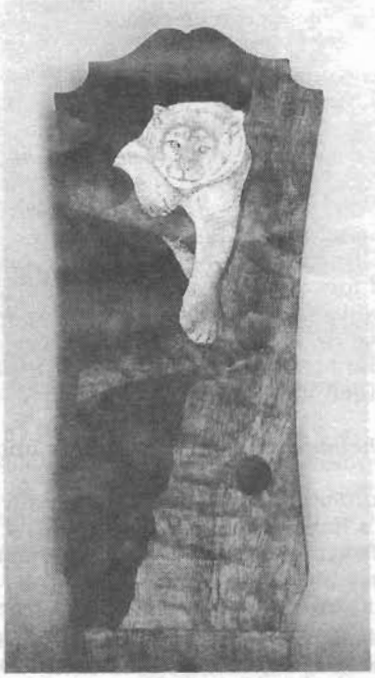
Patrick: Two things happened at once. I was introduced to Vicky, and I was introduced to the Highlands and in a very short time I had fallen in love with both. We started the process of building our home. We built a workshop and a studio and additions. We took our time and did it slowly and carefully. And somehow that was 26 years ago.

Thelma: And your home has a wonderful feel to it.

Patrick: That is what happens when you take your time with building. I've built many homes that have turned out well because the owners took the time to think a design through. One house was profiled in Harrowsmith magazine in April 1992 and it took three years from concept to occupancy. I am not designing homes any more though. I just found it takes too much time to do it well. I am interested in focusing on music now.

Thelma: Tell me about the work you do with guitars that are shown at international conventions for musical instruments.

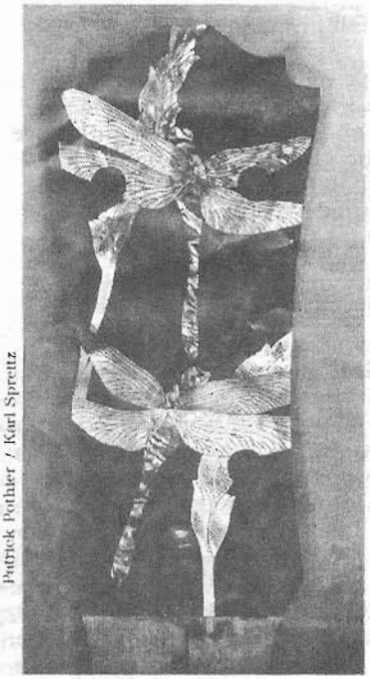
Patrick: My friend David Iannone has been making Morgan guitars for nine or ten years. When we work together, he builds the guitars for playing or exhibit. I create the designs. David inlays the shell into the wood and then I engrave it. I use a small tool that grooves like a plow. And then I fill in the groove with a black pigment. Here is an owl and a loon and an elephant with its trunk holding a vine that falls all the way down the neck of the guitar. The photos are of some of the pieces that went to Japan. This year the convention was in Kyoto, Japan. A number of instrument makers were invited to show their high-end instruments. We decided to do a series of guitars with inlaid artwork. We chose 'wild cats' as the theme for the series.



Patrick Pothier / Karl Spreitz

Engraved image of cougar on guitar shown at international convention in Kyoto.

Thelma: Do you get to sign your work?
Patrick: No, but every guitar has a serial number that can be traced to the records. I am registered with Morgan as the person who did the artwork.



Patrick Pothier / Karl Spreitz

Dragon fly image engraved into mother of pearl & abalone.

Thelma: Were you able to go to the exhibit in Japan?

Patrick: I had to choose between going to the exhibit in Japan for three days or going to France with Vicky on a three week painting holiday. I went to France.

Thelma: Did you enjoy painting in France?

Patrick: We went to a place called the Old Convent that had been a nunnery and a school. They provided food, transportation, art supplies and great instruction. Vicky has done lots of painting but it was relatively new to me. I loved it and got lost in it the way I get lost in playing my guitar. The only painting I had ever done was on the old Sierra Club Rainforest bus that has travelled all over North America. It's purpose is to bring about awareness of the rainforest issues. I built a little scale model of the bus and drew a rainforest on it and painted it and then painted the actual bus. It was lots of fun. It took me six weeks. It was an unusual canvas. That was my only experience before doing five paintings in France. It was a wonderful holiday and I learned something about painting, but I am much more drawn to the pencil and the engraving tool.

Thelma: Do you want to talk about your singing?

Patrick: Hmmm, singing is really important to me but it's hard to talk about singing. I just sing. I have always had a lot of encouragement to sing. I sing in an a cappella group called Vocal Point and in the Gettin-Higher-Choir'. For me singing is like going to the gym. It's fun, it's invigorating and it makes me feel good. Vocal Point will be performing at the Folk Festival in Victoria Harbour on July 3rd at 5:45.

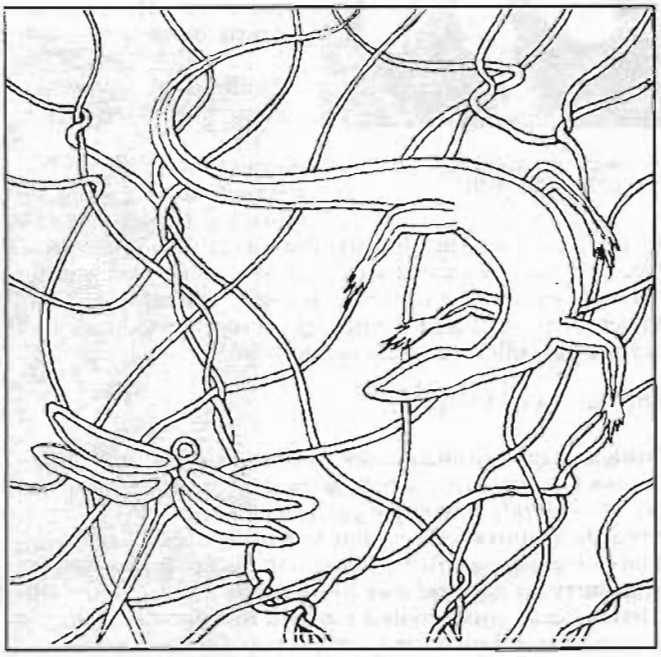
You might be interested in this collapsible classical guitar I made a few years ago (see cover). It is a product of my passion for music and building. I sang at Bob McMinn's party with this guitar

Thelma: And I'll bet you made the jacket for it too. It looks like a little Snoopy bomber jacket with two little pockets. Who would ever know that a unique, hand made classical guitar lived in that whimsical jacket! Hearing you describe your work and your family and your life in general, it sounds like you are a lucky man.

Patrick: I am very fortunate. I am a happy fellow and I like my life.

Thelma: Can you think of a metaphor for the artistic aspect of your life?

Patrick: I'm not sure about a metaphor, but I let things happen. I always have. And that has taken me to many places and into many situations I could not have planned. Just recently I spent some time in Greece and stayed with friends on the island of Mykonos. There was concern about robbery and break-ins in their house but they did not want the typical bars on the window. So I have designed my first piece of metalwork, consisting of a dragonfly and a lizard on twisting vines—effectively creating a barrier against break-ins but in fact being a piece of art



Patrick Pothier

Delicate design for metal window barrier .

Thelma: Thank you Patrick! ❀

Thelma Fayle is multiculturism advisor for the Ministry for Children & Families. Following this issue she will be taking leave from The Highlander in order to continue her studies towards an M.A. in Fine Arts. We wish her well and look forward to her return.

The Rise and Fall of "Aldermere"

Site of the Highlands' New Municipal Hall

Nancy McMinn

Time has fashioned a tapestry of change in the forests and wetlands in the verdant basin that drains the mountains and ridges of the southwest Highlands.

Here, in the mid 1870's, according to an early directory, George Frederick Hawkins became the first man known to be living in the vicinity of today's Highlands Municipal Hall. By 1880, commissioning a survey of the 160 acres surrounding Hatcher's Swamp and extending considerably westward towards Mount Finlayson, he had evidently decided to pre-empt and purchase the land. In June of '83, for the sum of $160, he purchased a crown grant to the land and assumed its ownership.

courtesy Robin Rye

Dr. Ernest Barron Chandler Hanington, founder of Aldermere.

For the most part, Hawkins is a shadowy figure. Who he was and where he came from have been largely lost to time. The well-executed signature on his crown grant suggests that he was not an illiterate man. What brought him to the Highlands we can only guess. Was it Hawkins who built the stone-based barn whose footprint is still just visible near the driveway to the Hall? Was it he who constructed the small "beehive" lime kiln nearby? And so, was Hawkins the original discoverer of the large limestone seam[1] that angles through the Highlands in this area and is the source of the beautiful white rocks also visible at the Hall site? We may never know, but clearly his efforts added value to the property. For when he sold, less than a year after his purchase, his investment was increased by more than sevenfold! The property changed hands a couple of times over the next two years and finally was sold to a well known Victoria physician, Dr. Ernest Barron Hanington.

About the time of Hawkins' sale, settler Joseph Lavender made a pre-emption claim on the quarter section immediately to the north. Lavender's history, like Hawkins' is largely unknown, but there are indications that he may have been one of several hundred "free" black settlers who came to Vancouver Island to escape oppressive anti-black legislation in California. They had been invited by James Douglas, who wanted to strengthen the colony of Vancouver Island by encouraging more settlement. Douglas' own roots—his mother is thought to have been a Creole—may have played a part in this compassionate gesture. Over 600 of these settlers arrived in Victoria on the steamship *Commodore* in the spring of 1858.

Lavender had worked as a labourer for a number of years before taking up his Highland pre-emption. At the time only the Millstream ran through the low lying rocky gulch that later was dammed to form today's Matson Lake. He built a small house near here, on a rocky knoll across Millstream road from Lost (now Teanook) Lake. Probably he had occupied the land for several years before April 1887 when he paid the $157 for the crown grant and obtained the deed to his 157 acres. We know next to nothing of his circumstances—only that, unable to write his signature, he simply made an X as his mark on the grant. At any rate, within only a month, he too had sold out. He made no money on his investment—In fact he lost seven dollars on the deal! Later Lavender's name reappears in a directory for the Highlands—as a labourer once again.

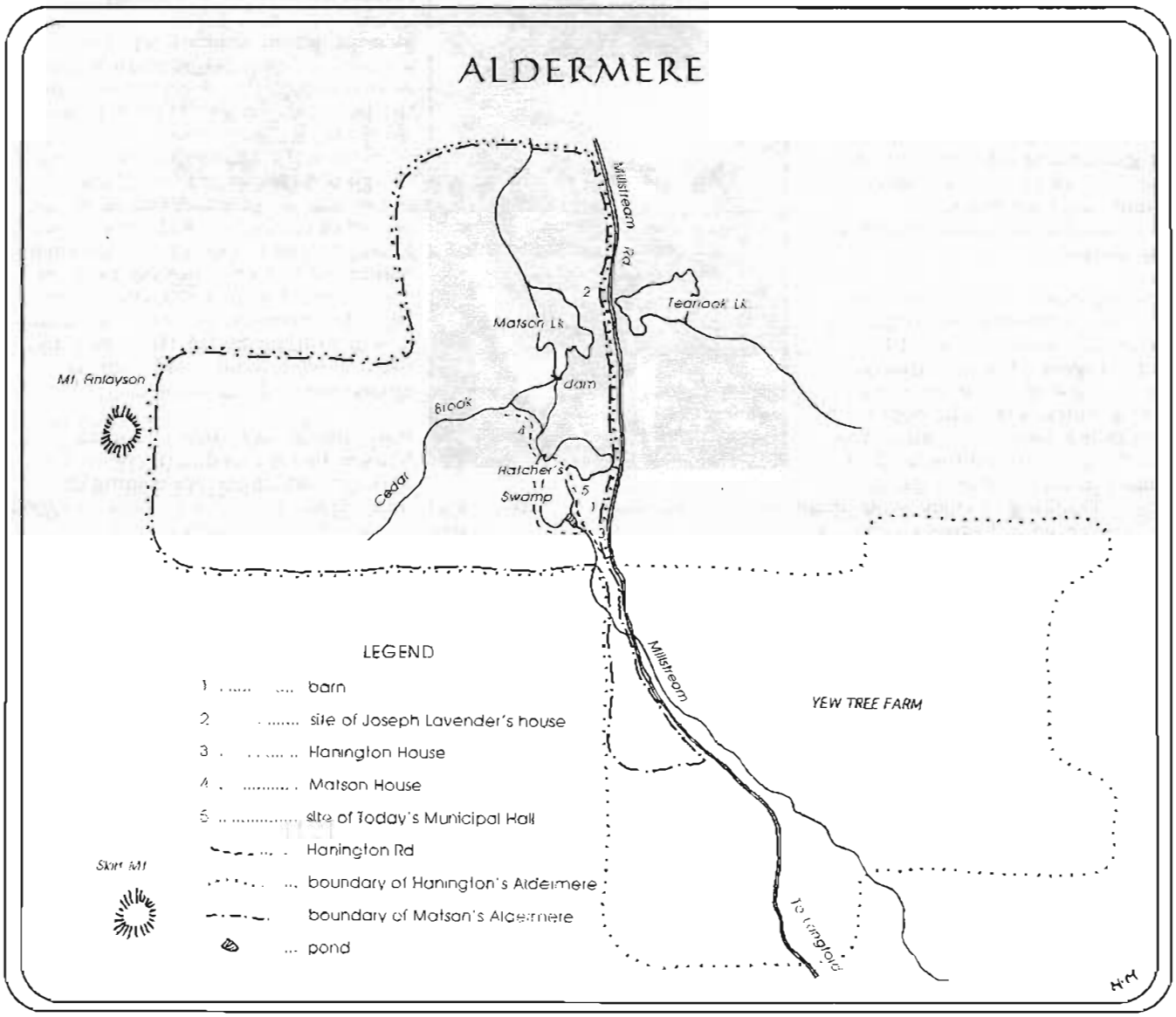
The purchaser of Lavender's land was also Dr. Hanington. Hanington was a man whose background is as accessible as Lavender's and Hawkins' are obscure. He was born in Shediac, New Brunswick, where his family had been established since the late 18th century. His father was at one time president of that province's legislative assembly. One brother was premier and judge of New Brunswick's supreme court. Another was a leading surveyor for the C.P.R., after whom Mount Hanington in Jervis Pass, is named. During one survey expedition, he could have been describing our Highlands when he remarked that "the country is a combination of rock ridges with lakes in between!"

Dr. Hanington also served the C.P.R. during construction, when as chief surgeon at Yale, he was in charge of medical work from Savona to Port Moody. When the line was completed, Hanington and his

[1] See *The Highlander*, Fall 1999, p. 11

family moved to Victoria where he soon made a name for himself as a brilliant surgeon. But medical practice was by no means his only passion. He soon began to assemble a large estate in the Highlands. In December, 1886, within two years of arriving from Yale, he had purchased the land that had been George Hawkins'. Six months later he was the owner of 360 acres, including Joseph Lavender's original holding.

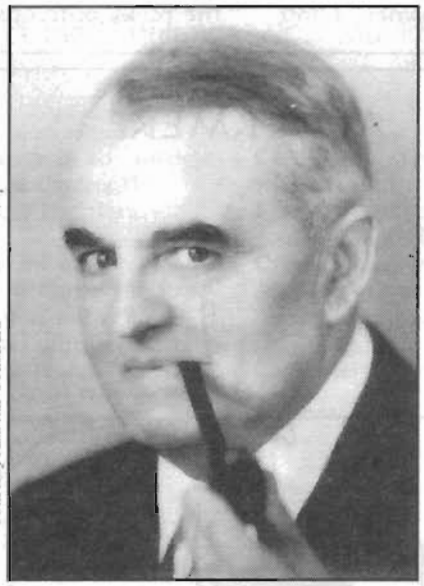
It was a magnificent property. Millstream Creek roared down rocky chasms or flowed through lush, quiet wetlands, gathering water from tributaries that drained lands far to the north and west—from the hills above Pease Lake and Mt. Work in the north, to the the Scafe Hills in the east and Skirt Mountain, Mt. Finlayson and the Gowland Range in the west. Through much of the landscape you could walk for miles under towering firs and immense cedars which formed a canopy so dense that scarcely any vegetation barred your way. Around the wetlands grew groves of massive alder and luxuriant ferns as tall as a man. In some places huge rock forms, many the size of a house and covered with moss, flowers and ferns, shaped the rugged topography, the legacy of ancient glaciers. Many birds sang in the swamps and from the rocky outcrops, while ravens and woodpeckers called from the deep woods. Deer, cougar, bear and wolves roamed freely and for the most part, unseen.



Before long a tall, narrow two-storey residence, the work of a prominent architect and a well known contractor, rose beside Millstream Road, near the small, lily-clad pond that drains the south end of Hatcher's Swamp. Aldermere had come into being.

During the ensuing years, Aldermere became the family's second home. It was close enough to be accessible to Victoria, yet far enough away to

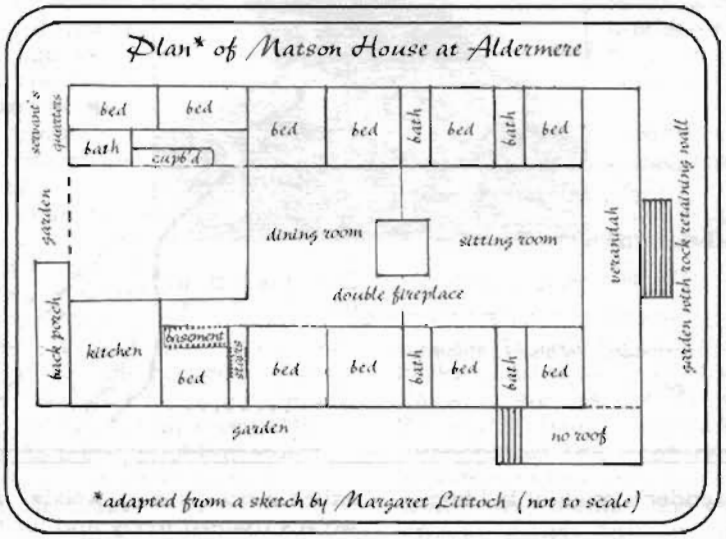
represent another life which the family loved, one that was freer, more relaxed, more in touch with people of the land. The doctor would drive out from Victoria in his specially constructed pony cart. His dogs rode on a shelf below and could jump out and run when they were inclined to. He was often seen, driving along the narrow country roads, the dogs running alongside. The children roamed at will, playing games in the woods, picking the juicy berries that grew in the forest openings. Their mother called them to meals with an old school bell. Grouse thrived in the sunlit woods of Douglas fir and arbutus. A common sound in spring was the rapid drumming of the males, an unmistakable sound that carried for long distances.



courtesy Alastair Cousland

John Samuel H. Matson

Shooting grouse and other game birds was a favourite sport but on one terrible occasion, it led to a family tragedy. It was January, 1887. The doctor's brother was visiting Aldermere. The doctor had been called down the road to Yew Tree Farm, to attend the birth of William and Ann Wale's daughter, Daisy. Thinking to enjoy some shooting, his brother set out cross country with his shotgun. He came to a fence which blocked his way and proceeded to step through it, then reached for his gun to pull it through. He must have accidentally pulled the trigger, for the gun went off, wounding him seriously. Bleeding profusely, he dragged himself to the road, where his sister-in-law, hearing his cries, harnessed the buggy and drove frantically to Yew Tree Farm to fetch her husband. They rushed back, but on reaching home, found that it was too late. Dr. Hanington's brother had died from loss of blood.



Matson wasted little time. He arranged for the construction of an impressive country house overlooking the Millstream.

The estate continued to expand. From William Wale Hanington, he purchased historic 730 acre Yew Tree Farm. The original farm had been settled and developed in the 1850's by young Caleb Pike and his wife, Margaret Lidgate, twenty-five years before Caleb and his sons built the homestead now known to us as "the Pike House". After acquiring Yew Tree Farm, Hanington turned his sights to the west. In 1892 he purchased Section 16, where seasonal creeks cleave steep slopes that lead towards the lofty summit of Mt. Finlayson. In swales dotted throughout the area are native hazelnut trees, whose pale, creamy catkins brighten the wintry landscape long before other harbingers of spring are apparent. The rock outcrops are splendid with wild flowers in spring. Aldermere now comprised about 1200 acres.

Meanwhile, the doctor's reputation as a surgeon, his practice and his family were growing. A few short years after the land assembly of Aldermere was complete, he commissioned the popular architect, John G. Tiarks to design a rather grand half timbered house and surgery in Victoria, at the corner of Blanshard and Kane (now Broughton St.). For a time, Aldermere continued to be the holiday focus of the family. But in 1909, the estate, with the exception of Yew Tree Farm, was acquired from Dr. Hanington by the colourful, flamboyant Victoria entrepreneur, Sam Matson.

Born and brought up in Ontario, Matson had studied both commerce and agriculture before coming to Victoria in 1889, where he put both to good use. Among his many commercial enterprises was a livery stable that grew into Vancouver Island Coach Lines and a ferry service that linked Vancouver Island with the Gulf Islands. Eventually he became the owner and publisher of the Victoria Daily Colonist as well as three other papers in Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo. His passion for farming and fishing coupled with experience in the real estate business gave him a keen eye for rural properties. He purchased Glamorgan, an early North Saanich homestead and took pride in his herd of black Angus cattle. With its huge, impressive, farm buildings, built of logs and heavy timbers, it was an Island showplace as a working farm for many years. Now no longer a working farm, it is still a beautiful and well maintained relic of the past.

After taking over Aldermere, Matson wasted little time. He arranged for the construction of an impressive country house overlooking the Millstream. It was an

Arts and Crafts bungalow, fifty by one hundred feet overall, and more reminiscent of the East Indian roots of that architectural style than its more usual California derivative. An imposing double fireplace faced, on one side, a central, beamed dining room that stretched to the roof where two dormer windows let in the light. On the other side was a large sitting room that opened onto a wide, spacious verandah with steps to the garden below. Eleven bedrooms, five bathrooms, and a kitchen surrounded these "public" rooms. The house was lit with kerosene and gas lamps. The domestic water supply came from Cedar Brook, a year-round stream that approached from the west. Water was delivered to a large, wooden reservoir by a hand pump or gasoline motor. From there it was carried to the house by gravity through a long pipe mostly buried, but occasionally running above ground in particularly rocky places. In a hollow not far from the house was the septic tank. Children were warned never to go near it, since on one occasion a cow had fallen in! In the cavernous basement was a furnace that took four foot cordwood and delivered heat through pipes to registers in the rooms. The kitchen stove was a large, woodburning affair called a Steamboat Range, with a solid plate for pancakes, a warming oven and coils around the firebox for heating water.

courtesy Margaret Littoch

The front room opened onto a wide spacious verandah with steps to the garden below.

Trout thrived in the clear waters of the creeks. About three hundred yards upstream from the house, the Millstream ran through a wide trough in the landscape, surrounded by rock outcrops. Here was a small lake waiting to be dammed, and Sam Matson was just the man to do it. A lake of his own? Keen fly fisherman that he was he relished the idea. But there was another reason for his interest—one that aroused his entrepreneurial instincts. In 1909 and for some time thereafter, Victoria experienced serious challenges to its water supply. Elk and Beaver Lakes were no longer able to satisfy the city's growing needs. 1908 and 1909 were unusually dry years. In its search for new sources, the city found itself in litigation with a private firm, the Esquimalt Waterworks Company, which was in a more fortunate position, having dammed Thetis Lake and a number of small lakes in the Goldstream watershed for delivery to Esquimalt. Efforts by Victoria to construct a system using Sooke Lake water encountered a series of mishaps, ending in the project's cancellation. The situation was critical.

Thinking to help fill the breach, Sam Matson had a sizable dam constructed on the Millstream. Exactly how he intended his water to reach Victoria is not clear. The nearest system he might have tapped into, the water pipes from Thetis and the Goldstream Lakes, were owned by the Esquimalt company and were not available to Victoria. Nevertheless he installed pipes and valves in the bottom of his dam. But apparently the scheme was abandoned before he went farther. Perhaps by the time the work was done, Victoria's water crisis had solved itself, because within a few years, the city had made arrangements to obtain most of its water, after all, from the Esquimalt Water Works Company. Nevertheless, Matson's dam remained, forming the small, idyllic lake named after him, and where he and his friends enjoyed catching the cutthroat that were native to the Millstream.

South of the bungalow, Hatcher's Swamp had been cleared and ditched for a pasture, and the barn near Dr. Hanington's old house could serve to stable horses as well as a shelter for cows. For Matson, his family and friends, the property offered a delightful range of leisure pursuits—hunting, fishing, riding, walking through a beautiful landscape or enjoying a game of tennis on the court built below the house on the flats by the Millstream. It was a lovely court, shaded from the summer sun by giant overhanging maples. Aldermere was a gracious and charming establishment, aptly reflecting the lifestyle of the well-to-do in Edwardian times.

But Matson's restless, flamboyant nature took him in many directions, acquiring other properties, often involved in new business or cultural ventures. He was the moving spirit behind the Royal Theatre, built in 1913 on the very spot where Dr. Hanington's mansion had been constructed less than twenty years before.

courtesy Margaret Littoch

Herbert & Mary Ann Merry had two sons, Jim and Eric and a daughter, Margaret. It was a good place to bring up a family.

At Aldermere, Herbert Merry and his family became established as caretakers. By the early twenties, Matson was ready to sell and Merry and his partner, Harry Telford, resolved to purchase it. Cordwood was in great demand at the time, and woodcutting was a thriving industry in the Highlands. Wood burning furnaces and stoves were common. The Empress hotel, the many small, local schools and numerous other

institutions and private homes were heated with wood. In the Highlands, small, hastily built log cabins were thrown up as temporary accommodation for woodcutters, many of whom were Chinese. Some of the cabins were lined with cardboard galley sheets, used in the production of local Chinese newspapers. Their columns of Oriental characters were an unexpected and colourful artifact in these rustic westcoast dwellings.

Merry and Telford's plan was to set up a cordwood business, the profits of which would purchase Aldermere. They hired woodcutters and piled the wood at the edge of the field beside the road, so that it could be easily hauled away. That winter a terrible storm struck the district. The low lying field, originally a swamp, flooded. Millstream Creek, passing alongside the field, was in full spate. All of their hard earned cordwood was washed away! And with it went their high hopes for purchasing Aldermere. Nevertheless, whether they owned it or not, Aldermere was a good place to live and bring up a family. Herbert and Mary Ann (Molly) had two boys, Eric and Jim, and a daughter Margaret. It was a free and wonderful life for the children. They fished and swam in the lake and streams, wandered freely wherever their hearts took them, picked fruit from the orchard trees down by the barn, drank the good milk from the family cow, and generally enjoyed themselves. They attended Langford school—a two room building with four grades each. There were no near neighbours, except for the occasional woodcutter who would temporarily inhabit the empty Hanington house. Near the old house, across the Millstream by the pond at the foot of the field, was a cabin where the Chinese driver of the wood truck and his family lived for awhile.

Don Fenn

The concrete base of the grand fireplaces is a massive, ghostly hulk.

The boys were fond of swimming skinny in Matson Lake. No one ever bothered them. But one day, they had just jumped in, when some girls appeared out of nowhere. Horrors! Eric grabbed for his sweater and tried to pull it over his legs while still in the water. In his haste and embarrassment he became entangled in the sleeves and began to panic. Jim dashed back to the house for help and his mother, fearful he might drown, ran the third of a mile to the lake, her heart racing in fear. Eric survived, but Molly suffered a permanent strain to her heart thereafter.

The family saw little of the Matsons. Once Mrs. Matson, a tall, stately woman, brought her grandchildren out to pick ladyslippers. She seemed to love the place. Margaret, now living in the Interior, remembers that occasionally Matson's friends would come out in hunting season, and sleep on the verandah. Once in a while groups would hold parties in the big rooms, but Mrs. Merry didn't cater for them. Life for the Merrys went on much as usual.

In the mid-thirties, Herbert Merry became ill and was in and out of hospital. It was difficult for Molly and the children to care for Aldermere without him. Eventually, in 1937, they moved to town where they could be closer to Herbert. It was a sad time for the family and it marked the beginning of the end for Aldermere. Sam Matson had died in 1931. The house was left empty and soon took on a derelict air. The garden became overgrown. Soon the war came. The economy was focussed on armaments and supplies for the fighting forces. Building supplies were hard to come by. With the big house seemingly abandoned, people slipped in and began taking away a few boards here, a washbasin there. Before long not a board or brick or piece of plumbing remained. This grand and beautiful house had been stripped to its very foundation. The skeletal remains, almost hidden in the dark forest, lent an air of mystery to the place. Among the local youth rumours abounded: Someone had been murdered in the big house—it was haunted. And as for the parties. Well.....! Their imagination knew no bounds.

Today the bones of the grand country house lie moss-covered and forsaken. Sizable trees grow through the old bedrooms. In the centre, the concrete base of the grand fireplaces is a massive, ghostly hulk. The posts that marked the tennis court have long since rotted away. The shouts and cries of Margaret Merry and her brothers no longer echo through the woods. The voices of the partygoers are mute, and the chatter of Chinese woodcutters is stilled. The meadow where horses and cows grazed is once again a vast swamp where lady fern, skunk cabbage, hardhack, willow and a rich mosaic of other species grow in tangled profusion. The human cycle that was Aldermere has completed its turn and Nature has reclaimed her own.

But history never stands still. Not far from Hatcher's Swamp and a stone's throw from the site of Dr. Hanington's house and the remnants of the barn and orchard, yet another human cycle, in the form of the new municipal hall, has just begun. ❀

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Can you solve this mystery? Who was Hatcher? The large swamp beside the road, just north of the new Municipal Hall is called Hatcher's Swamp. No-one seems to know why. Do you?