



From Floathouse...

To Clubhouse!



DICK PATTINSON PHOTO

Our Club has had a colourful history ever since our Clubhouse cruised into its present berth. Elaine Evans, a former resident of the house, recently visited the Club and she writes the following letter to Commodore Harold Brochman:

July 12, 1998

First of all please accept our thanks for our wonderful stay at my old home! It's a pleasure to see the improvements and the innovative way the club has met and dealt with the many challenges on changing an old style home into a useful clubhouse—and such a history that home has!

In about 1944 Ben Reid at Minstrel Island started to construct the log float and began the home. In 1945, when we came to Minstrel Island from the North West Territories, Dad and Mom (Allan and Anna McDonald) completed the house and we moved into it in about 1946. As it was intended that the home would be moved out of Minstrel Island, the float was particularly well made with extra lashings of wire rope to hold the logs together. Extra large logs were used to form the sled the house rested on—necessary in order that it could be moved onto land. In 1947, Mom and Dad bought the waterfront property in Ganges Harbour through Gavin Mouat's real estate company, and readied our home for sea travel.

The bathtub was filled with water for washing and flushing the toilet; three klim cans (used to store 50 pounds of powdered milk) and several large bottles were filled with drinking water; an extra supply of wood for the cook stove

was brought onto the float; the piano was moved so that it rested against an interior wall; extra food for a family of three adults and four children was purchased; the electricity was disconnected, and we were ready to go. Dad had hired the "Harris VI" from Pacific Coyle Navigation Co. Ltd. Towing a log float house and family could be a tricky manoeuvre—if the logs broke apart, the house would sink! Dad and the tug captain thoroughly checked the lashings of the logs, and each day that we were under tow, the captain returned by small boat to check that they were holding up well. Once he saw the way the float was made, he commented that we would be "as safe as in a church", so we were off—our first obstacle was Chatham Channel, then out into Johnstone Strait with Race Passage as the next challenge. On passing boats we would often see people looking at us through binoculars—I suppose we were an unusual sight although it seemed normal to us! All went smoothly and we were into Okisollo Channel with Lower and Upper Rapids then Hole in the Wall. We waited for a short while for slack tide and then in the early evening we were off. Even as a young child I sensed that this was a pretty dangerous place. While we were quite used to putting on our life jackets whenever we went outside, that night the life jackets were next to our beds. Mom says that we children slept right through and the house and float came through unscathed. We gradually made our way through Desolation Sound, across Georgia Strait, through Dodd Narrows, and into Ganges Harbour.


On arrival in Ganges Harbour our first visitor was Will Dawson (see enclosed articles). Dad had his TD14 hauled to the property and logs were cut to act as rollers, a dead man anchor was installed about where the house is now, and two blocks were used—one at the dead man and one on the sled. The house was rolled up the hill, end first then turned to lie as it does today. It was blocked into a reasonably level state, and we were able to sleep in it that night.

The basement was dug, and Harry Milner from Fernwood was hired to do the cement work and to build on the two porches. We tried to find our own water supply—Father Larivierre, the Catholic priest on the island at that time, came and witched the land for us, but in the end we had to hook onto the water system that Lynn Bittancourt and several neighbours had. John Wymes came with his team of horses to plough up the garden, and so we settled into Island life.

As a child and teenager, I loved this place. It is wonderful to come back and remember those “good old days”!

Thanks again for the hospitality, I hope my little story and the enclosed information is helpful for your history of your club.

Yours very truly,
Elaine Evans

TELEPHONE PACIFIC 2171 CABLE ADDRESS: "PATUBA, VANCOUVER"	MAILING ADDRESS: P. O. Box 490 OFFICE: FT. BROUGHTON STREET VANCOUVER, CANADA
Mr. I. McDonald, Ganges Harbour, Salt Spring Is., B. C.	July 31 1947 INVOICE No. 2737
	PACIFIC COYLE NAVIGATION CO. LTD. TOWAGE AND LIGHTERAGE
FORM 8 BH 11-47	
To towing float with house from Minstrel Island to	
Salt Spring:	\$500.00

The article on page 4, 'Sea-Going Cottage', originally appeared in Will Dawson's book *Ahoy There*. It was chosen to be included in the *B.C. Centennial Anthology*, published in 1967.

As is often the case, authors will sometimes embellish the facts for a more interesting story. In Will Dawson's case, the following are examples:

1. No white picket fence and no porch.
2. No brick chimney—a brick chimney couldn't withstand the strain of the water movement. We had two Yukon chimneys—one for the kitchen wood stove and one for the duotherm oil heater we had in the living room.
3. The bath tub was filled with water for washing and flushing the toilet. Mom had other containers for drinking and cooking.
4. We all have had a good chuckle where my grandmother is quoted. Grandma was born in Czechoslovakia and spoke very broken English. The description of Hole in the Wall attributed to her must have come from someone else's grandmother! It would hardly have been possible for her to be knitting in the middle of the night—we had a gas lamp that hung from a hook in the kitchen. We did not use it on the trip down (it was summer and the days were long). The mantle in the lamp was still intact when the house arrived in its present location.

5. Swimming was not an activity we engaged in. The water through Johnstone Strait is very cold. Also, the currents and speed of the tow would make it a dangerous pass time.

6. The wearing of life jackets is not unusual. When the house was tied up at Minstrel Island, we had to put on life jackets each time we went out. We were young, active children, and one of us seemed to find it necessary to fall in every week! The life jackets were pretty uncomfortable—the old pillow type filled with kapok. With all the dips in the water, the canvas covers soon began to rot. This actually saved my older brother's life—he was out trying to anchor a small raft, threw the anchor over board and it caught on his life jacket. Fortunately, the canvas ripped, so he got just a good dunking and quite a scare.

7. The tug would not be able to come along side when we were under tow. Each day the captain came in a small boat to check out how the float was standing up. Mom always loved to bake and she often sent some “goodies” back with the captain for the crew.

8. As for fishing—we didn't have anything as fancy as a rod and reel. We did have little hand lines which we used around the docks to catch shiners and sea bass. We had no equipment that would even come near to catching a salmon. Mom would never have allowed us to fish out of our bedroom windows!

—Elaine Evans

Sea-Going Cottage

By Will Dawson

One bright Summer's morning Eileen looked out of a port and said: "There's a house anchored near us!"

I continued shaving.

"I mean it—honest! It's a cute little cottage with a fence all around it and flowers in tubs on the porch."

We lay at anchor in a small bay near the head of Ganges Harbour, Saltspring Island, in the southern coastal waters. To our left were the tree-clad and house-dotted slopes of the island; to our right the calm waters of Admiral Channel. That a cottage with a fence around it and flowers in tubs on the porch should cruise in here and drop anchor seemed a flight of fancy. But somehow it had become a fact.

The cottage lay close enough for us to see its details clearly: a substantial frame building with a neat white picket fence around its broad wooden platform. On either side of the closed front door stood two tubs of what appeared to be geraniums. There were white curtains at the windows. A wisp of blue smoke rose up from the red brick chimney. We could see the anchor cable which secured the cottage to the sea-bed four fathoms down. It led from a post at the right-hand side of the front porch.

We ate a quick breakfast and rowed over to this sea-borne cottage. Four children greeted us, the eldest a pretty blonde girl of about twelve years, making fast our painter to the picket fence; then they all trooped with us to the door where we were introduced to their mother....

The living-room was in no way different from most living-rooms of homes ashore. The walls were papered and hung with pictures; the furnishings of chesterfield suite, piano, large radio, electric lamps, rugs, tables, were comfortably ordinary; there was even a goldfish bowl on a table near the door with a goldfish swimming languidly in it....

The cottage, like most dwellings in upcoast communities, [had been] built on a raft of massive cedar logs knit together with beams and solidly planked over. Logging-camps move and new fishing-grounds are discovered, and so it is handy in these parts to have a mobile house. Once the decision had been made to sail downcoast in their cottage, the McDonalds engaged a tug, disconnected the water supply and the electric power lines, and filled the bathtub with drinking water. The tug made fast a towing cable, and the cruise began.

On the first day out the house ran into a thick fog and had to heave to till the weather cleared. Sailing mostly by day, but sometimes at night if the tide required it, it made its way slowly down long, tide-ridden Johnstone Strait.

To pass southward from Johnstone Strait it would have to run one of several passes: Discovery Passage with Seymour Narrows and Ripple Rock as hazards, the Yucultas with their whirlpools, overfalls, and tide rips; or Okisollo Channel and Hole-in-the-Wall. Okisollo has currents but it was Hole-in the-Wall which presented the greatest danger in this passage, for Hole-in-the-Wall is a three mile cleft between Maurelle and Sonora Islands, a cleft with steep walls of rock rising abruptly from the sea which is often profoundly agitated, especially near the centre where tidal streams meet.

The skipper of the tug, faced with the choice of these three passes, decided on Okisollo and Hole-in-the-Wall. He timed his arrival at the Hole so as to miss the full impact of

the current at its western opening and the confusion of tide rips in the middle. This meant that he had to pass through with the cottage at night.

Mrs. McDonald's mother described this part of the cruise.

"As I say, I don't know anything about the sea," she said. "So I didn't know enough to be scared—not at first. Then we got inside this Hole-in-the-Wall place. It was blacker than the inside of a silo. You could almost pick the black out like it was coal, it was so dark.

"The house began to sway about. I was knitting. I kept dropping stitches. I went out onto the verandah. The tug-boat's lights seemed an awfully long way off, and the cable looked thinner than I remembered. I tried to see the land but I couldn't even see the sea, except where the lights from inside shone on it. How the men in that boat knew where they were going beat me! I felt really worried. Nobody else seemed to be worrying, so I went back inside and made coffee just for something to do."

The cottage sailed through Hole-in-the-Wall and out into a channel named Calm Channel which, in spite of its name, can be lumpy in a sou'easter. A sou'easter blew. Vases were taken from shelves, pictures laid flat on the floor, and the goldfish bowl set next to the skirting-board with cushions wedged about it. The tug towed the cottage into the lee of an island, but not before the full bathtub had slopped water out over the floor, and waves had flung their tops heavily against the front door and front wall. The wind subsided and the cruise continued.

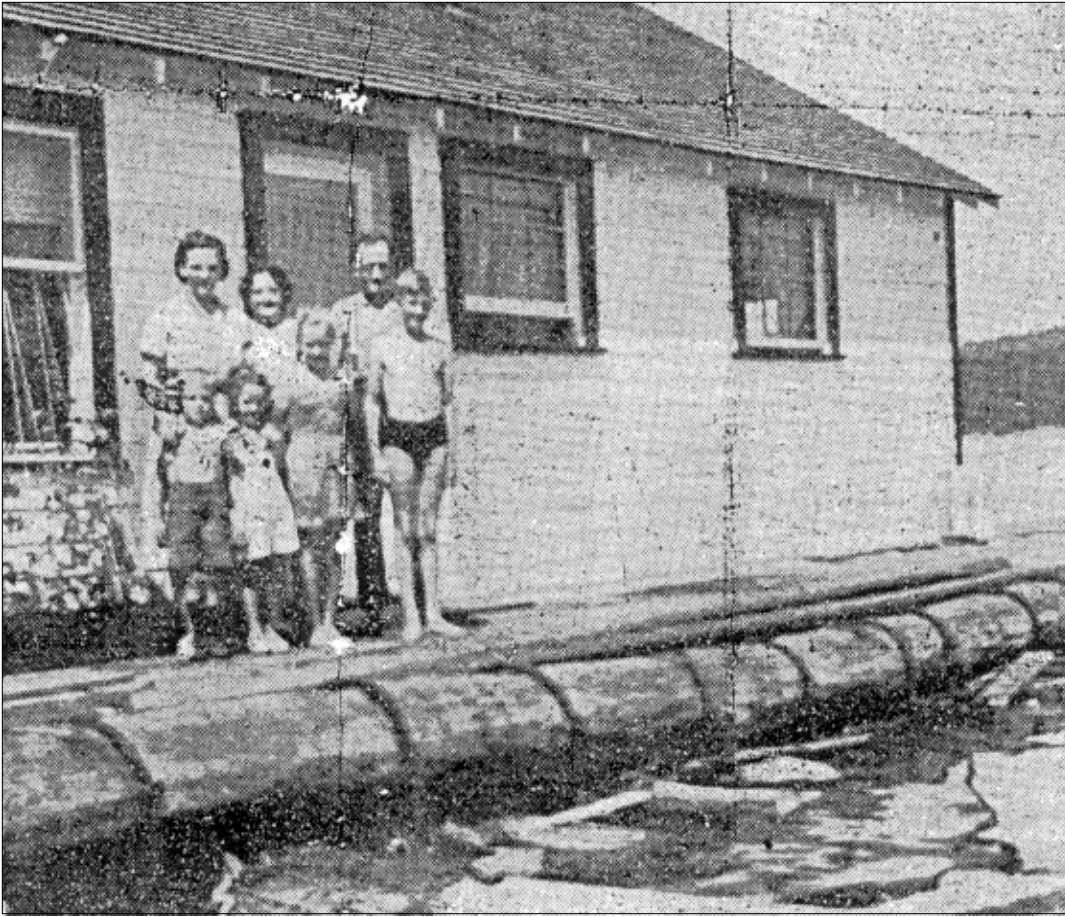
The routine of home life went on almost as if the house were firmly based ashore. Baking and cooking, reading, mending, talking, even games at the table, going to bed and getting up—it was a pleasant and healthy routine. But there were some unusual variations not found ashore: the older children diving off the porch and swimming along with the house; the younger children complaining at having to wear life jackets from the time they got up to the time they went to bed; the tug coming alongside to pick up pies, or buns, or bread fresh from the oven; the sudden blast of a steamer's whistle greeting, in some surprise, this unusual fellow traveller. And there was the fishing. The youngsters parcelled out the verandah into individual fishing spots, and they ran hand-lines out of the bedroom windows. The shrill cries of excitement when a salmon struck, the urgency on a small face in the bedroom doorway seeking help from Mom or Granny or Dad to haul a salmon over the picket fence—and the illusion of normal life was soon shattered.

Seven days after the tug had taken the cottage in tow, the cruise ended in this little bay in Ganges Harbour on Saltspring Island. The distance cruised was slightly over two-hundred and fifty miles...

On Saltspring Island, where the land slopes gently down to a little bay near the head of Ganges Harbour, are several attractive homes. Among them is this sea-going home. With timbers and rollers under it, it was hauled up from the surface of the sea by tractor and jacked up. A cement foundation was built under it, more rooms were added, water, electricity, and telephone connected, and there it stands today, primly conventional, yet a house which, one might say, has had an unusual and an adventurous past.

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Mr. and Mrs. A. McDonald and Mrs. F. Ruzicka, and Douglas, Joan, and twins Jim and Elaine McDonald on the 'porch' of their floating home

The Vancouver Daily Province
Thursday, August 7, 1947

Modern Noahs settle on Salt Spring

Family 'Sails' five-room house 200 miles

by Will Dawson

A two-hundred mile cruise in a fully-furnished five-room house complete from upright piano and comfortable chesterfield to the goldfish swimming in the bowl ended safely early this month for the McDonald family. They came with their house and all personal belongings from Minstrel Island to Ganges, Salt Spring Island.

The family includes Mr. and Mrs. A. McDonald, their four children, Douglas, 12 years, Joan, 10 years, and the six-year old twins Jim and Elaine, and Mrs. McDonald's mother, Mrs. F. Ruzicka.

They started their cruise July 28, when the Pacific Coyle Navigation Co. tug "Harris No. 6" put a tow-line on the floating house at Minstrel Island and its 165 horse-power Diesel engine started turning on the long haul through the tricky norther waters.

On Ganges property

The family have had their house on its solid cedar log float hauled by tractor onto their waterfront property at Ganges. Mr. McDonald is engaging in the sawmill business near

Rough at times

Near midnight house and tug ran through the Hole in the Wall. The house wove slowly on the tow-cable to the set of the current.

Occasionally vigorous south-easterly winds buffeting up the inland waters sent waves splashing on the front door. The house moved gently to the motion of the sea. But the McDonalds gave no thought to the rocky shores or to potentially dangerous reefs or possible storms.

Neither did Mrs. Ruzicka, although this cruise down British Columbia's coast in her son-in-law's house was her first experience of the sea. The powerful tug and its captain and crew had their confidence. Also, Mr. McDonald spent seven years operating his own tug and barge transportation service in the Great Slave Lake, North West Territories.

Meals as usual

"I baked bread and pies and cookies, prepared three meals a day right on time, just as usual," said Mrs. McDonald. "We carried on just about the same as if we were at Minstrel Island. I didn't pack a single thing. Just left everything as you see it, vases and ornaments in their usual places and not one moved an inch.

"One morning I got up and couldn't see land anywhere," continued Mrs. McDonald. "Only the tug ahead. It seemed strange for awhile. I suppose morning mist hid the land."

The children fished from the house and played on the float always safely clad in life-jackets and under a watchful eye. The only real problem of the 200-mile household cruise was fresh water. The McDonald's solved it by filling up every conceivable container, including the bathtub. They had still a little left when the tug left them safely moored at Ganges.