

A landscape photograph showing a vast field of purple and yellow flowers in the foreground and middle ground. The field is interspersed with green grass and some rocks. In the background, there are trees and a hazy horizon under a cloudy sky. The text is overlaid in the upper half of the image.

**FIRST NATIONS LAND USES
AND KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS
UNDERPINNING THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE VICTORIA
LANDSCAPE**

FIRST NATIONS LAND USES AND KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS UNDERPINNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VICTORIA LANDSCAPE

SITUATION BRIEF # 7

Contributors: N. Turner, R. Turner, M. Segger, C. Elliott, G. Keddy, M. Layland R. Linzey, J. Lutz, C. Gower, B. Simonsen, F. Verspoore

“Coastal Douglas-fir zone, dry subzone with Garry Oak and Arbutus interspersed with prairies.” Dr. Nancy Turner, ethnobotanist

“The place itself appears a perfect ‘Eden’...” James Douglas, 1842

“We are still here.” Andy Thomas (1948-2018), Songhees Nation Chief

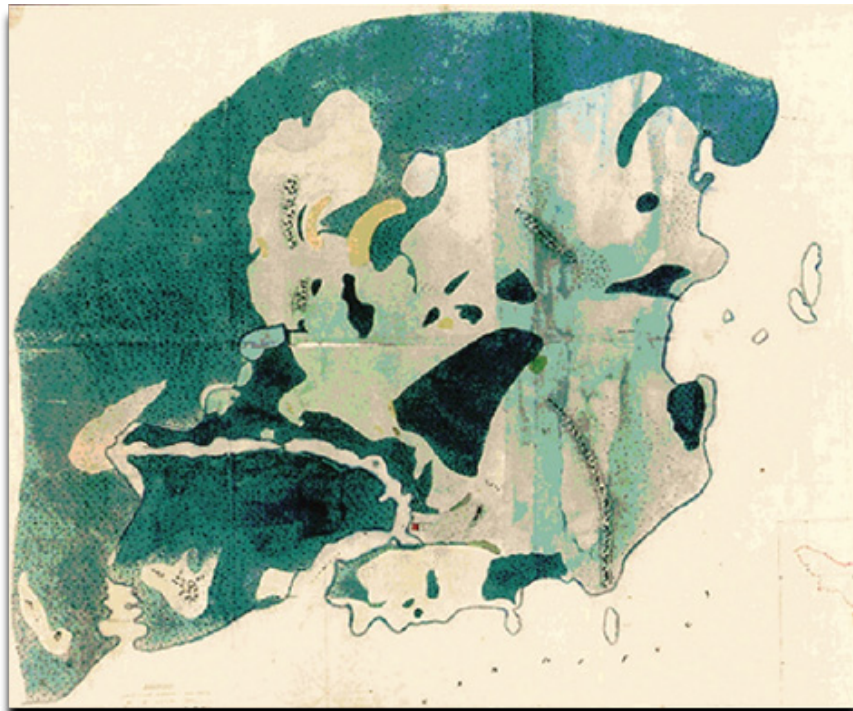
The concept of intangible heritage is fundamental to understanding the cultural history of the Victoria landscape. There are numerous and obvious intersections between the first indigenous peoples, the local landscape and early settler cultures, positive and negative: on the one side siting and building the original fort, trade relationships, sharing of food resources and production technologies, through to the recent renaissance of First Nations art and efforts to revive Indigenous languages – on the other side the reserve system, wage economy, the potlatch ban, segregated schooling, language loss. That agency increasingly shifted to the white settler population in these transactions, along with power, constitutes what we term today as “colonialism”.

Beyond the local, research on early contact periods in the Indo-Pacific also relies heavily on intangible evidence. Cosmologies, belief systems,

technologies like navigation, knowledge keeping such as those imbedded in genealogies, and resource-gathering traditions, overlap and show linked patterns of development both before and after the various phases of European contact.

To read this from the evidence surviving in our tangible heritage is challenging. A starting point might well be conceived as knowledge and memory embedded in “place” - whether that is landforms, flora and fauna, or human trackways and waterways for instance.

Historical introductions provided in local First Nations’ websites outline the historic Indigenous presence in the landscape of present-day Victoria but lament how difficult it is to read that presence in our urbanized environment today. Interpretative panels accompanying the Spindle Whorl territorial markers of the Songhees attempt to shed some light on early habitation, transportation and food gathering practices in various locales.

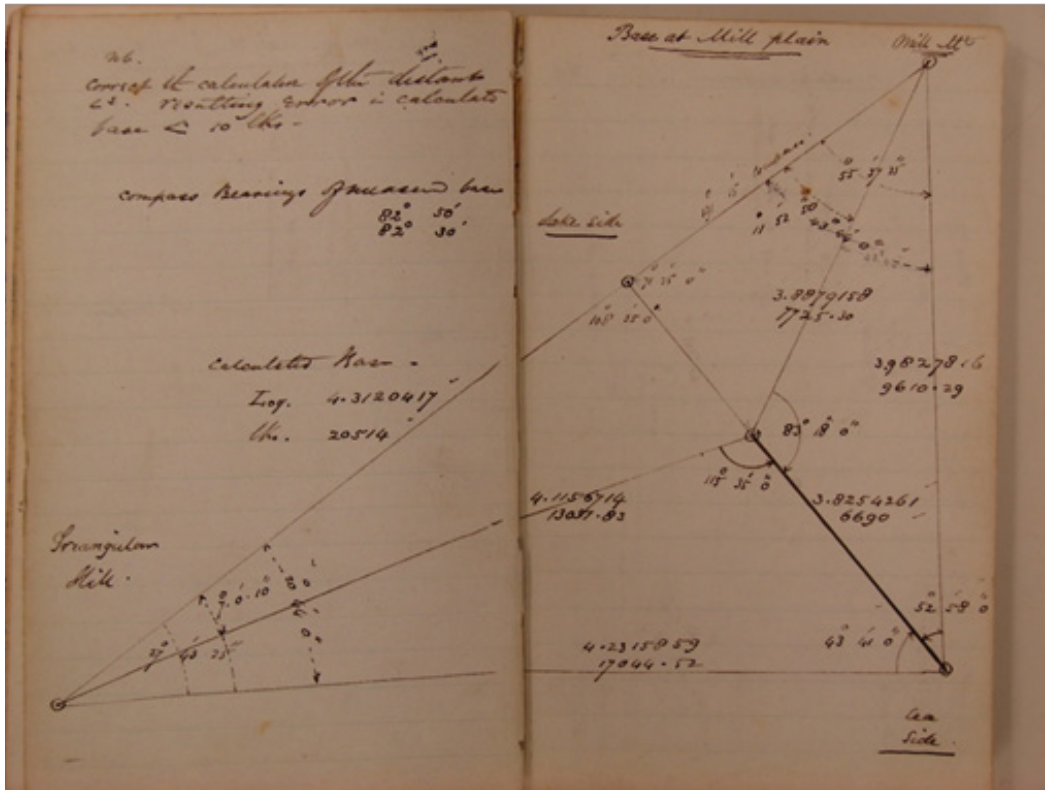


1842 Map of Camosack. Adolphus Lee Lewis cartographer. Showing the harbour, Gorge waterway, east to Cadboro Bay, the proposed location of Fort Victoria, and general vegetation. Courtesy of the Hudson Bay Company Archives. Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

But evidence there is if we carefully seek it out. We might start with the planning of the Victoria townsite which overlaid traditional First Nations use of the lands, significant land-form features, trackways, village sites, agricultural and other food-sourcing activities. One logical observation would be that millennia-old transportation corridors underpin the main roads providing entrance and exit from the Victoria's Downtown core. However due to the lack of urban archaeology along these lines, this remains speculative.

For millennia the Victoria area has been home to Lekwungen peoples, a subset of the Coast Salish language group. We assume that the first humans entered this area most likely by land, marine and via ice-free access points. This would mark the time that humans began to populate the area, and in doing so had to learn how to cope and adapt to what we could also assume was a "new" phase of cultural development and response to a changing landscape (beginning about 10,000 years ago). We are then looking at human adaptation to a slowly changing landscape and physical events (such as tsunamis, glacial melts, changes in the availability of traditional foods). For example, when did salmon become a reliable food source, and what trade patterns developed from its local abundance?

A first source for information is Indigenous people themselves and how they relate to the land by stories associated with places and geographical features, also who lived where (families) and how they used their environment. These stories might be owned by families, or they might be just generally shared. Also, these stories are often used by contemporary First Nations artists to inspire their public art (poles, plaques etc.) and often relate directly to the places in which the art works are located. Indigenous public art in the Greater Victoria landscape today is a good place to start public education.



J. D. Pemberton's Note Book indicating early survey techniques.

Landscape features such as roads following Indigenous trails are clues to traditional land uses. There are many alignments between pre and post contact patterns of settlement. Colonial surveyor J. D. Pemberton laid out his master triangulation network for Victoria using hill tops. His bronze pin-scans are still found in some of these places. Pemberton then 'hung' his parcel surveys off this triangulation grid and naturally tended to use some of the alignments as an organizing principle. One can see this in two Downtown grids: Old Town and Rock Bay don't quite align. Road allowances in the parcels were made to follow the boundaries of the HBC/Crown granted parcels so inevitably the major roads ended up aligned with the hilltops. For example, Richmond and Foul Bay are two roads aligned with Mount Tolmie. Such topographical features were often noted sacred sites for the Lekwungen speaking peoples but also functioned a lookouts

and orientation points to mark family resource rights such as clam beds and Camus harvesting locations.

Grant Keddie's book *Songees Pictorial: A History of the Songhees People as seen by Outsiders, 1790-1912* (2003) along with his on-line extensive field notes and annotations for the book, comes very close to demonstrating this. For instance, based on Keddie's findings we can take a map such as the Pemberton/Pearse 1851 projected town plan for Victoria, over-lay it with a present map of Victoria, and it becomes apparent that major axial arterials such as Government Street, Fort Street, and Humbolt Street followed previous track ways or marshland waterways.

But what immediately stands out is the use of the Victoria Harbour/Gorge waterway as an intensively managed food resource: from estuary reef net sites, herring fishery, wild fowl habitat, oyster beds, salmon runs into the tributary creeks - over thousands of years. Obviously the harbour front was the logical site for the establishment of the Fort and thus the core of what would later become the City.

Michael Layland's *The Land of Hearts Delight* (2013), recounts how Pemberton set out the base of his master triangulation framework from the bell tower of the Fort to Sangster's Plains (the latter feature running from the bluffs south of the Esquimalt Lagoon to the southern extent of the former gravel pits, now Royal Bay). Fort Street would seem, given its intersection with the same 'base station,' to be an alignment foundational to Pemberton's arrangement of District Lots. Pemberton's interpretation of the class-based Wakefield System of colonization, although soon abandoned, then influenced the early planning of the settlement.

Often the disruptions to the grid reveal the pre-contact trails networks. The Old Esquimalt Road, Cook Street, Fairfield and Cedar Hill roads are a good

examples of this phenomenon.

Chiefs Andy Thomas and Ron Sam have described the Lekwungen language group as being encircled by the peaks of the Sooke Hills, inscribing an extensive arc which includes Mount Doug. Further investigation into this inclination to use hill tops as orientating features for Indigenous orientation in the landscape might have led to similar alignments of trails and other man-made features.



Map of the Districts and Victoria and Esquimalt in Vancouver Island. 1854, John Arrowsmith, show subdivision of farmlands.

The Esquimalt First Nations website describes how several family villages occupied the lands that now comprise the four core Municipalities. The Victoria (Matoolia, indigenous name of Victoria) area was divided into five territories. These lands essentially belonged to settlements that were made up of extended families: Tsuli'lhchu, around Mount Douglas (P'q'a'ls); Cheko'nein, around Cadboro Bay; Chikowetch, around Oak Bay; Swenghwung, around James Bay; and Xwsepsum (sometimes spelled Kosapsum) in what is now called Esquimalt.

Many of these villages and their cultivated hinterlands then became the first colonial farms, first those of the Hudsons Bay Company then those sold to many of its retiring officers and the first colonists: Viewfield and Beckley HBC farms now comprise most of Esquimalt; Cadboro Bay settled by Todd family, South Oak Bay the Ross's, Fairfield the Douglas's, Rock Bay the Work family. These farms supported the first generation of Metis families ushering in nearly 100 years of Metis dominance in the local agricultural economy. Over time these farms were developed into Victoria's major suburban neighborhoods,

As HBC surveyor and then Surveyor General for the Colony of Vancouver Island, J. D. Pemberton bridged Lekwungen traditional land uses to the early colonial settlement patterns in the Victoria region. Pemberton was a skilled surveyor, very obviously acquainted with the practicalities of urban planning and the current High Victorian theory relating to how Picturesque aesthetics could be expressed in urban planning. From an upper-middle class Anglo-Irish family, he studied at Trinity College, Dublin, and pursued a successful career as a civil engineer. Just before leaving for Victoria he served as one of the founding faculty members of the new Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester where he taught surveying and mathematics.

Pemberton's plan, developed with his assistants B. W. Pearce and later H. O. Tiedemann, provided for major streets wide enough for boulevards. The

James Bay government precinct was developed as an ornamental park within sight of Beacon Hill and the Beacon Hill park reserve. Under his direction H.O. Tiedemann designed the “Birdcages” essentially as a set of ornamental park pavilions. Both the Gorge waterway and Rockland, essentially organized as park-land or garden residential estates were early harbingers of the Victoria self-image as “the Garden City”.

No doubt these land uses were to a great extent based on in-place, First Nations practices. HBC Chief Factor James Douglas himself was first attracted to



J. D. Pemberton Plan of Victoria 1861

the harbour location for the fort when he saw these open woodland parks and pastures, unaware this “aesthetic” had been created by Indigenous cultivation practices such as under-story burning and cropping Camas bulbs. Escarpments, ridges and hill-tops – many later coveted for their magnificent vistas as building sites for the City’s elite – had been protective look-out sites for local First Nations who had settled the nearby shorelines.

When Douglas diarized his now often-cited reference to the environs of Victoria as “the perfect Eden” in the Spring of 1842 he looked out on what he might have thought was a Romantic scene: a vista of gently rolling open meadows, the drifts of blue camas fringed by oak-treed parklands. Perhaps he recalled the lines of William Blake’s patriotic poem (later hymn), “Jerusalem”, penned some forty years previously, its famous concluding line “in England’s green and pleasant land”. Not immediately connecting this “managed” landscape with a local population was likely the result of a less than idyllic reality. Historian John Lutz has pointed out that by the 1840s the local population of Lekwungen-speaking people was still reeling from the effects of a period of devastating epidemic diseases, starting with a pre-contact bout of smallpox in 1782 followed by measles and influenza through the early 1800s.

Douglas carried out a census in 1850, counting about 700 local First Nations people, down from what might have been a pre-disease resident population of up to nearly 1,600 only one hundred years before. Trade and the movement of goods and people, and the introduction of some European products, such as alcohol, would perpetuate this sad decline throughout the Pacific Northwest well into the early years of colonial settlement. In 1876 a regional census counted only 182 local Lekwungen people and by 1900 the population of the Songhees and Esquimalt totaled only 130 before starting to rebound.

The influences of, and on, Joseph Pemberton for the layout of Victoria streets and properties provide rich untapped veins of inquiry - both for history and for speculation.

The first substantial, material urban interface between local First Nations, and those incoming, was the layout and construction of Fort Victoria - right at the centre of a nexus of thousands of years of preceding patterns of uses for First Peoples' seasonal gatherings and trade. Two decades later came Joseph Pemberton's initial survey layout of what would become in 1862 the City of Victoria. The pressure for a timely completion of these early lot plans was the suddenly arrival of thousands of migrants on their way to Fraser gold-fields in 1858, along with the entrepreneurs who stayed and established service industries to support them.



Panoramic View of Victoria 1889 Pub. The Colonist.

The rise of Douglas Street as downtown's 'Main Street' (succeeding Wharf Street, and Government Street) reveals that Pemberton was in effect Victoria's first urban design planner. One noteworthy element in the downtown street layout was the determination of the widths of Douglas and Yates streets as intersecting 100' ROWs (Right of Ways) in a grid of 60' ROW streets.

The Douglas and Yates intersection happens to straddle the high-point of a general plateau - with cardinal views in all directions - at what would eventually develop as the 'centre' of Victoria's Downtown - (similar to Granville and Georgia Streets in Vancouver, or Portage and Main Streets in Winnipeg).

For over a century Douglas /Yates would function as the recognized city centre, the 'main intersection', the best-known downtown meeting location for Victorians, (also the prime location for street photographers), and the hub for commercial land development through-out Victoria's commercial core. Other street layouts throughout the City also provide an intriguing under-explored subject - with Pemberton continuing as an active 'ghostwriter' for considerable areas of the City neighbourhoods.

In preparation for the *Victoria Official Community Plan of 2013 –* Victoria's planners walked a great deal of the City neighbourhoods, and then wrote over-view observations on characteristics of Victoria's urban geography. It was very evident that a number of principle streets took what appeared to be random routes - likely based on pre-colonial Songhees pathways - convenient trails through an uneven landscape. Fort Street is a prime example.

Then the City's very distinctive block-patchwork (with its lack of rigid over-all street grids) could be related in part to the 'land sectioning' between these paths (pathways themselves conditioned by geographic elements such as hills and streams). So, a seeming random system of over-all street patchworks was likely related to the early parceling of tracts of land ownership - often small

farms or frontier estates - with their own internal roadways setting patterns of subdivisions and individual street lay-outs.

Other factors related to patterns of long-standing First Nations occupancies also provided considerable influences - for example many



Map showing Street Car lines in Victoria, Island Blue Print, 1936.

seasonally, continuously occupied sites were at beaches in sheltered bays: villages at locations such as Gonzales Bay, McNeal Bay, Willows Beach, Cadboro Bay, Telegraph Bay, Cordova Bay, Brentwood Bay, Patricia Bay, Robertson Bay, etc. These prime locations were often pre-empted to become first, day-use recreation spots, then beach cottage areas, weekend holiday resort locations (i.e. Cadboro Bay and Oak Bay Beach hotels) - and then far-flung primary residential clusters - scattered within an emerging regional metropolitan area. As with the early trail and pathway systems - these locations were soon linked with roadways, followed eventually by street-car and inter-urban rail-lines, then eventually where needed, regional arterial highways - all with an underlay of the original First Nations patterns of occupancy and travel.

The progressive subdivision of properties throughout Greater Victoria also reveals an implicit social landscape, evolving over the decades - for example hillside slopes provided fresh air and views for large estate homes - many still evident in Rockland, Upper Fernwood, Summit Hill, Oak Bay, Old Esquimalt Road, and the terraced slopes of Uplands. Valley floors such as Fernwood and the marsh land of Fairfield opened up with denser grid-iron subdivisions for working class families, the latter a bungalow suburb for Victoria's professional middle-classes.

As the nineteenth century closed, and with twentieth century technological progress, types of roadways and block sizes evolved, decade by decade. Initially downtown streets were determined by the layout of Fort Victoria, then the small early blocks and alleyway system of Old Town related to the era of servicing Victorian-era sailing shipping with hand-carts and wagon routes to the harbour-front. Later streetcar lines would confirm or determine main through-fares and commercial strips serving distinctive neighbourhoods.

These scattered residential nodes were infilled by the early automobile-

influenced subdivision patterns (too late for residential alleyways for much of Victoria City, but evident in the lane-way neighbourhoods of south Oak Bay). Later decades implemented patterns of residential streets derived from the styles and technologies prevailing - such as the cul-de-sac subdivisions of the 1950s to 1970s - the last stage of subdivisions in the City of Victoria.

Another intriguing factor in the urban geography of the City of Victoria, (and of surrounding younger municipalities) was the influence of municipal services. The first major underground waterline main was in fact buried under



“Return of the War Party”. Songhees Village and Fort Victoria. Watercolour, 1847. Paul Kane.

Douglas Street just as the street ROW was developed - connecting first to artesian wells at 'Spring-ridge' in the Fernwood district, but planned to connect to proposed new major water supplies at Thetis Lake, and later at Beaver and Elk Lakes. This may also have been anticipated even in Pemberton's original layout of roadways for Downtown Victoria - with Douglas Street foreseen to carry the primary City waterline.

The expansion of City services - waterlines, storm and sanitary pipe networks - also influenced the evolution of the City of Victoria boundaries.

Progressive expansions of the City-related extensions of these services in roughly two to five-year cycles as a rolling boom lasted up to the time of the First World War. Victoria's boundary expansions were finally halted with the incorporation of surrounding sister municipalities (c1908-1914) who then took on their own subdivision, street development, and servicing programs.

We have lost much of the detailed anecdotal descriptions of intricate patterns of local land-use by First Nations - but some have lived on - or may be recalled in various texts and stories. The process of recovery is underway by efforts such as the collaborative Living Lab project at the University of Victoria.

White settler remembrances of Victoria in the early 1890s contain stories of progressing through the wetlands and tidal marshes from James Bay to Ross Bay pulling small shallow boats to go winter duck hunting in the flooded areas of South Fairfield - a pattern of longstanding activity learned from the region's earlier occupants who had done hunts similar for centuries. Soon Chinese, Japanese and white entrepreneurs developed small marked gardens and then opened grocery stores in the neighbourhoods to sell locally-sourced provisions such as game poultry, fish, and seasonal vegetables and fruit - again, strikingly parallel to the patterns and example of local First Peoples, who themselves had for generations gathered seasonal local produce, game, and fish, for exchange, trade and personal consumption.

An iconic feature is the Garry Oak/Camas meadows of the Greater Victoria area. These were maintained, tended and expanded by the First Nations and were a key source of food for local communities. The meadows were intensively cultivated for the camas bulb which provided the bulk of the starch in their diet.

Only small vestiges of this landscape survive, and many invasive plant species have since impacted them. The Garry Oak ecosystem is highly

endangered. Maintenance of the Garry Oak and Camus meadows has been disrupted since colonization by prohibition of the Indigenous practice of careful landscape burning and harvesting, then more recently by private property subdivisions, and urban expansion. There are remnants remaining. Beacon Hill Park, Government House, Uplands Park, Mount Tolmie and a few others in the urban core are surviving examples now undergoing restoration.

The papers of J. D. Pemberton's son recount how, while attending his dying father at his Rockland house in the 1893, he could hear the pumps draining water out of the wetland below. Fairfield was emerging from swamplands of the old Douglas Farm. Two salmon streams (now culverted) ran inland from Ross Bay approximately skirting the sides of what is now the cemetery. First Peoples hunted ducks and geese there in these marshes. There are still remnants of those wetlands at the South end of Cook Street in Beacon Hill Park marked by a stand of cottonwoods and salmonberry, skunk cabbage - a vestige of the original wetland habitat.

Two elders (Chief Charlie Jones, (Queesto) and Clan Chief Adam Dick, (Kwaxistalla) recounted that there was a shallow bay where the Empress Hotel is now that was "the best clam beach on Vancouver Island." Evidence of this beach can be seen on occasions when the Hotel arranges tours of its foundation pilings, still washed by tidal flows.

So, these, and a web of other stories factors, piled layer upon layer, comprise Victoria's historic story line, buried under and within the current physical corpus of Greater Victoria.

Observations

- The speculative nature of this paper underscores the need for a serious program of urban archaeology. Such a program would seek to reveal a

stratigraphy of evolving land-uses and the role of early First Nations in that history. Sporadic post-contact archaeological work in the past has not always been followed up with the publication of results.

- In a similar vein, much work needs to be done in the field of oral history research with First Nations elders and knowledge keepers, in particular regarding the post-contact period of Victoria's history. This would assist in revealing the on-going role of Indigenous people as they engaged with settler society as tradesmen, artisans, farmers, artists, religious adherents, military services, or social engagements such as the Masonic societies, amateur sports organization, etc.
- Recent initiatives such as Oak Bay's installation of cairns commemorating Lekwungen coastal village sites and Victoria's spindle-whorl sculptures marking culturally significant sites to the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations need further elaboration throughout the Greater Victoria area.

Resources

Pemberton Survey Files in the BC Archives: The JDP Records are scattered in various locations. The search links below indicate what is available. There may be some overlap. As far as cartographic material is concerned, a large number of the maps are not in the online catalogue.

<https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/informationobject/browse?topLod=0&query=AAAA1263>

<https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/informationobject/browse?topLod=0&names=21498>

<https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/informationobject/browse?topLod=0&actorId=21498&eventTypeId=111>

There is also correspondence in the Colonial Correspondence Collection (GR-1372) which has been digitized and is available online. Of interest would be the following:

-JDP file Pemberton file <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pemberton-j-d> (PDF attached)

The Lands and Works Files (includes Colonial Surveyor and Surveyor

General correspondence) particularly the ones shown here. PDF scans are attached to each file.

See also:

Brenda Clark, Nicole Kilburn, Nick Russell. *Victoria Underfoot: Excavating a City's Secrets*. Harbour Publishing (2008)

Harry Gregson. *A History of Victoria 1842-1970*. Morris (1970).

Grant Keddie. *Songees Pictorial: A History of the Songhees People as seen by Outsiders, 1790-1912*. RBCM, (2004)

Michael Layland. *The Land of Heart's Delight: Early Maps and Charts of Vancouver Island*. Touchwood (2013)

Michael Layland. *A Perfect Eden: Encounters by Early Explorers of Vancouver Island*. Touchwood (2016)

Michael Layland. *In Nature's Realm: Early Naturalists Explore Vancouver Island*. Touchwood (2019)

Wayne Suttles. *Affinal Ties, Subsistence, and Prestige among the Coast Salish*. *American Anthropologist*, 62/2 April 1960

Nancy Turner. *Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge: Ethnobotany and Ecological Wisdom of Indigenous Peoples of Northwestern North America*. McGill, Queens (2014)

Nancy Turner. *Keeping It Living: Traditions of Plant Use and Cultivation on the Northwest Coast of North America* Douglas E. Deur and Nancy J. Turner (2005)