

## Esquimalt's Jack Bates— The Guardian of the Guardhouse

Jack Bates' roots run deep in the Work Point area of Esquimalt, B.C. His grandfather and great-uncle were stationed at the barracks with the Royal Engineers from 1893, taking up residence nearby after completing their service. His father was stationed there in B Company of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) from 1921 to 1937, and two of Jack's siblings were born there. He grew up next to the barracks and joined the Royal Canadian Signals Cadet Corps in 1954 in Work Point, eventually serving six months in the Congo with the United Nations. Work Point is in his blood.

"Having such a keen interest in Work Point, with its personalities, buildings and events, I started involving myself more deeply in its story, doing research and accumulating documents and photographs," says Jack.

When the 3rd Battalion PPCLI moved to Edmonton, change was in the wind at Work Point Barracks. Demolition of the Officers' Mess and Quarters by the Department of National Defence (DND) in 2006 had been preceded by the loss of other, smaller historic structures. But the surprise sale of the 121-year-old Guardhouse in 2005 galvanized Jack. He decided to adopt it.

The one-storey, wood-framed Guardhouse, located at 445 Head Street, was built in 1891 and has remained the focal point at the entrance to Work Point Barracks ever since. One of three military guardhouses in Canada's Federal Heritage Registry, it had been designated as a "Recognized" heritage building by the Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office, and although the classification was lost when it was sold out of the federal inventory, a protective covenant was included in the agreement of sale.

During the four years that it took to



**Jack Bates** in front of the Guardhouse at Work Point, Esquimalt, now home to the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Cadets.

**Jack Bates** devant le poste de garde à Work Point, Esquimalt, maintenant la base des cadets de la Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

finalize the sale of the Guardhouse, Jack devoted himself to its upkeep. DND had fenced off the building from Work Point proper, leaving it vulnerable to deterioration and vandalism. Jack obtained permission from the new owner to perform routine maintenance and devoted himself to cutting grass, trimming bushes and raking leaves so it would appear "attended to," as he says.

"I had to advise the fire department that it wasn't DND jurisdiction any longer. Picking up the garbage and windblown pieces of roof shingles, keeping the critters out of the ventilation openings, doing minor repairs—it seemed to be working. It was quite a project. And I can tell you where the wasp nest was. That was quite a battle!"

By June 2009 the owner had given Jack the key, making him the unofficial contact for the Guardhouse in Victoria. He quickly made it his business to find a tenant and organized an open house that month. When a friend tipped him off that the PPCLI Cadets were looking for a new home, he saw a perfect opportunity. He introduced the cadet captains to the Guardhouse, and tenancy agreements soon followed.

One of Jack's major concerns was the lack of water service to the building. DND had cut it off some months before. He met with Esquimalt Engineering

and the municipal water works people on site, and prepared and submitted drawings and permit applications for a water service installation. The application was approved and water was running by December 2011.

The Cadet Corps had spent four years sharing space at High Point church in Victoria West. "We like this building a lot more," says 15-year-old Cadet Sgt. Curtis Wittla. "It's just ours." He added that all the cadets felt more connected to the Corps' history since they moved in.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the event took place with much fanfare this past January.

"Now that the new tenants will bring renewed life and purpose to this old survivor ... I'm hoping that improvements will be on the agenda. Fresh paint and a new roof would be nice!" says Jack.

The Guardhouse was listed on the Esquimalt Community Heritage Registry late last year, and applications are being prepared for provincial heritage recognition and reinstatement on the Canadian Registry of Historic Places.

But Jack Bates is not done yet. He is currently compiling a "Garrison History of Work Point Barracks."

Victoria News, B.C., 01/27/12; *The Lookout* (Navy News Online), 01/31/12; and [www.historicplaces.ca](http://www.historicplaces.ca).