

Lewis Street

A Historic James Bay Street

Lewis Street is one block long and runs north from Dallas Road. There is no vehicle exit from the north end. The street is narrow and without sidewalks. The lots are narrow, and the houses are situated near the street. Most of the houses were built before the Second World War with many dating from the turn of the century to the outbreak of the First War. The variety of architectural styles include Victorian Vernacular, Edwardian Vernacular Arts and Crafts, Colonial Bungalow, California Bungalow and English Arts and Crafts Bungalow. The tight grouping of the houses and the compact nature of this unusually intact historic streetscape offers a window into what a typical James Bay street might have looked like prior to the Second World War.

The origins of Lewis Street go back to the 1870's. In 1876 William Charles Robinson, an English born wholesaler and customs broker built his home, *Gladys Villa*, facing Menzies Street on two acres of land at the north end of present-day Lewis Street. Two years later Captain Herbert George Lewis, a native of Hertfordshire, England and Master of the Hudson's Bay Company ship, the Beaver, purchased property on Dallas Road and built a substantial residence at the south end of what is now Lewis Street.

The first tentative route for Lewis Street was deeded in 1889 and may have originally been a driveway through the Captain Lewis property. Travelling north from Dallas Road for 30 metres, the street turned east and connected with Menzies Street. In 1904 the easterly section became Brotchie Lane and Lewis Street itself was extended north from Dallas Road to the southern boundary of the *Gladys Villa* estate.

Ten houses were built along Lewis Street before 1911. The residents at that time included four ships captains, two carpenters, a dressmaker, a stores man, an engineer, a labourer and a curiously entitled woman of "own means".

In 1911 two brothers and a cousin from Baldur, Manitoba purchased *Gladys Villa*. John and George Playfair and George Cramer subdivided the property into 12 lots. Lewis Street was extended further north and the end of the street was connected by a footpath to Menzies Street. (Curiously, the 8' easement for the footpath first appears in the original 1872 survey of the area). Four of the new lots fronted on Menzies Street. *Gladys Villa*, now situated in the middle of the subdivision was moved to a new lot on the northwest corner of the property and became 66 Lewis Street.

50 Lewis Street was constructed in 1912 and was the first new house to be constructed in the subdivision. 53 Lewis Street was the last to be built and was completed in 1929. For a time, it was the home of George Cramer, one of the developers. The house received Heritage Designation in 2011.

The North Lewis Street subdivision development was interrupted by the economic downturn in 1913 and the onset of the First World War in 1914. Work resumed again in the 1920's.

The architectural design of most of the 12 houses in the 1911 subdivision reflect the fashion of the period in which they were constructed. Edwardian Vernacular Arts and Crafts before 1914 and English Arts and Crafts during the 1920's. However, the style of the first three houses built after the war harken back to the era before 1914. Each of these three were constructed in 1922 and are located at 44 Lewis and at 60 and 64 Menzies Street. 60 Menzies was the home until 1925 of subdivision developer George Playfair. 60 Menzies received Heritage Designation in 2013, as did 39 Lewis, 43 Lewis and 50 Lewis in 2014.

The Captain Lewis House was demolished in the late 1960's making way for an apartment tower. Two 19th century homes at the south end of Lewis Street disappeared in the early 1980's with the development of the Dunn Elm Village townhouse complex. In the 1970's the working class 1911 cottage at 34 Lewis was bequeathed to the city by its last owner and was removed to make way for Lewis Park which has become a focus for the street and a well used neighbourhood amenity.

The 1913 house at 62 Lewis and the 1876 *Gladys Villa* at 66 Lewis were demolished in the early 1970's in favour of a parking lot for the Albion Court apartment building. In the 1990's two new houses were constructed on subdivided lots at 15 and 27 Lewis Street. Most of the remaining pre-Second World War houses retain their original facades and for the most part the feeling of an early 20th century Victoria streetscape has been maintained.

Ten years ago, the neighbourhood marked the 100th anniversary of the 1911 Lewis Street extension and subdivision. During the event temporary historic informational signs were installed on each property indicating the date the house was built, the first residents names as well as their occupations. In 2018, with the assistance of a City of Victoria Good Neighbourhood grant, permanent descriptive, historical plaques were installed on the front fences of each of the 18 properties on the street. There have also been discussions about installing a plaque at the end of the street which would outline in text and photos the history of the street and its early residents. Many people, both local and visitor, walk along Lewis Street each year. It is clear from many casual conversations that the historic ambiance of the street is often the reason that they choose this route.

We recognize that the historic flavour of a street can disappear very quickly. Descriptive signage, plaques and photos greatly enhance the experience for a visitor but offer little value if that flavour has been tarnished and the balance tipped by the disappearance of one too many heritage buildings. Residential Heritage Designation of more residences and ultimately, the designation of Lewis Street as a Heritage Conservation Area can further the process of helping to protect this community heritage asset in the heart of historic James Bay.