

Exploring the remains of Shaketown

A century ago, Lynn Valley was a thriving logging community

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North Vancouver Museum and Archives curator Karen Dearlove sits with the sculpture of Walter Draycott at Pioneer Square. Draycott chronicled the early days of Lynn Valley and drew many sketches of the area as it once looked. photo Paul McGrath, North Shore News

One year, on Valentine's Day, the bronze statue of early North Vancouver pioneer Walter Draycott that sits at the corner of Lynn Valley Road and Mountain Highway went missing.

The commemorative piece was discovered soon after, sitting next to a bronze statue of an elderly woman on a bench in Coal Harbour near the entrance to Stanley Park. The Draycott figure was separated from his new lady friend without incident, returned to Pioneer Square, and firmly bolted in place so he wouldn't wander off again.

The disappearing Draycott case is just one of the amusing anecdotes North Vancouver Museum and Archives curator Karen Dearlove has up her sleeve. Dearlove had the opportunity to share many of these true tales during a recent historical walking tour of Lynn Valley, or "Shaketown" as the neighbourhood was once nicknamed.

"It refers to the fact that this area was known for logging and specifically mills for making shingles. Shake is another term for a shingle," Dearlove explains.

Houses across the North Shore and Vancouver were built using cedar shingles made in Lynn Valley and people flocked to the region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for work. One of the area's early settlers was the aforementioned Walter Draycott. Born in England, he bought property in Lynn Valley in 1911 and built his house on what is now Draycott Road.

"He died at the ripe age of 102 and he kept incredible diaries and photographs and he actually wrote a book which was published in the late 1970s about growing up here, so he's just a wonderful source of so much information about the history of this area," Dearlove says.

A talented artist as well as an author and historian, Draycott served as a sketch artist for the Canadian military during the First World War. He also drew lots of pictures of his community in its early days. Dearlove has one such illustration enlarged and laminated. It depicts a heavily forested landscape, dotted with simple houses and tree stumps, and traversed by Hastings Creek, a tote road and a shingle bolt flume.

Today, traffic whizzes through the intersection of Lynn Valley Road and Mountain Highway. Standing at the noisy corner, Dearlove holds up black-and-white photographs of the spot as it once looked. A church used to stand where Maple Leaf Garden Centre is; the Brier Block stood where Petro Canada is; and there was a mill at the corner of what is now Mountain Highway and Harold Road.

"This was really the reason why there were so many people living in this area because a lot of the employees of the mill would live in these little surrounding bunkhouses and work at the Lynn Valley Lumber Co.," Dearlove says.

The Fromme Block is the only original structure that remains at the intersection. For years it housed a hardware store on the ground floor, but the building has since been restored and TD Canada Trust now occupies the street-level space.

Away from the hustle and bustle of the town centre, hikers may come across relics of Lynn Valley's logging past in the nearby woods. Dearlove says there are still surviving pieces of the old tote road, which was used to transport heavy loads by horse and wagon, as well as sections of the shingle bolt flume, a raised wooded trough that was flooded with water and carried pieces of wood down to the harbour.

There are unfortunate stories of dogs and cats drinking from the flume and getting swept away. And there are daredevil tales of millworkers who used the contraption as a wet-and-wild form of public transportation.

"Apparently, because it was far easier to travel down the flume than it was to travel down the road, a lot of young men used to try to use that as a way to get down to Moodyville and down to the harbour," Dearlove notes.

Mill operations in Lynn Valley wound down in the 1920s, marking the end of the Shaketown era, but by that point land had been cleared, roads had been built, residents had settled, and the streetcar connected the community to the rest of North Vancouver, making it an attractive area to live.



The crew of Lynn Valley Lumber Co. mill poses on skid road. Company owner Julius Fromme is pictured in a white shirt. - North Vancouver Museum and Archives

Dearlove's historical stroll around Lynn Valley earlier this month was a Jane's Walk, which is a free, citizen-led walking tour inspired by the late urbanist Jane Jacobs. The inaugural event was meant to complement the North Vancouver Museum and Archives' existing summer theatrical programs: the Shipyard Pals and the Mountaineering Pals entertain visitors at Shipyard Plaza and Lynn Canyon Park, respectively. If there's enough interest, Dearlove says she'd like to lead more historical Jane's Walks in Lynn Valley and beyond.

"Understanding more about the history of your community and how it was built and the people who built it gives you a better sense of place and a better sense of the community you live in and I think it connects people better to their community," she says.

To learn more about upcoming museum programs and events, visit nvma.ca (<http://nvma.ca>). Visit janeswalk.org (<http://janeswalk.org>) to search for Jane's Walks in your area.