

How did Houlihan Park get its name?

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Plan of proposed location of Houlihan Park, 1980 (Saanich Archives vertical files)

The Houlihan Brothers come to Canada

James and Patrick Houlihan emigrated from Ireland to Saanich around 1870 and settled on what is now Richmond Road, near Mount Tolmie. Patrick continued to live in the Mount Tolmie area with his wife Anna, but sometime in the 1880s, James moved to the Gordon Head area, purchasing 100 acres of heavily timbered land in Section 85 from John Work. In the early years, James earned a living by raising race horses, a profession that Patrick continued into the 1930s, and by selling cordwood cut from the Douglas firs on his Gordon Head property. Initially, he cut and delivered the wood himself in a horse-drawn wagon, but was eventually able to hire help. As the land was cleared, he planted an orchard and produced abundant crops of potatoes, hay, and grain. James married Hannah White in 1893 and they had two children, Mary Ann “Mamie” born in 1897, and William James “Jimmie” born in 1898. Their house faced in the direction of Gordon Head Road, but after part of the Houlihan property was donated to build the lower part of Ferndale Road, their address became 2133 Ferndale Road.

The Early Years: Farming and Feuds

While Hannah is described in her obituary as having been a “highly respected pioneer” and “beloved by all who knew her,” James and Patrick did not always get along with their neighbours, their disputes often ending up in court. The most dramatic of these disputes began in early 1878. On 2 April 1878, their neighbour Michael Finnerty was charged with threatening Patrick’s wife a week earlier. The Houlihans’ relationship with Finnerty had begun amicably; Finnerty had worked with both brothers at different times in previous years. However, a land dispute between Finnerty and Patrick that began in early 1878 seems to have instigated a contentious relationship. The next incident happened on 8 April 1878 when James was charged by Finnerty “with having stolen a quantity of cord wood.” Then, in June 1878, James claimed that a few days earlier, Finnerty had “beat him about the shins and knees and cut his head with a sharp instrument.” Finnerty admitted to the attack, but claimed that it had been self-defense after James shot at him.

HOULIHAN has laid a counter information against Finerty setting forth that Finerty beat him about the shins and knees and cut his head with a sharp instrument. Unless erysipelas sets in it is highly probable that Houlihan will speedily recover from the effects of his injuries. As soon as he does he will be put on his trial for shooting at Finerty.

Daily Colonist, 25 June 1878

2 P. M.
James Houlihan, charged with shooting at Michael Finerty on the morning of the 21st with intent.
Mr. Mills appeared for the prosecution, and Mr. Robertson for the defence.

Daily Colonist, 6 July 1878

These accusations resulted in James being charged with shooting at Finnerty and Finnerty being charged with assaulting James. Finnerty's version of the incident was that he was driving down the road when James appeared and shot at him. James allegedly took several shots, all of which missed, until Finnerty was able to knock the pistol out of his hand with a stick. James then bit Finnerty on the shoulder, and Finnerty beat him further with the stick before taking the pistol and leaving James lying in the road. James' version was that Finnerty had beat him, unprovoked, and that after he had been knocked down and beaten, he took a pistol out and a single shot had gone off accidentally. He also alleged that he was only carrying the pistol because of threats Finnerty had made previously after Houlihan's cattle had crossed into the disputed land between the two properties. By 19 July 1878, the judge who had heard both cases, *Finnerty vs. Houlihan* and *Houlihan vs. Finnerty*, decided that because the evidence in each case was "so diametrically opposite" both should be sent up for trial in front of a jury. Bail was set at \$2000 for both James and Michael Finnerty. The trials resumed in November 1878, and the juries returned verdicts of not guilty.

The land dispute between Finnerty and Patrick Houlihan was officially settled by the BC Supreme Court on 22 August 1878, but the brothers continued to have altercations with him. A renewal of hostilities between Finnerty and the Houlihans occurred in March 1879 when Finnerty alleged that he was walking past the Houlihan property after a St. Patrick's Day party when he was accosted by them. The brothers claimed Finnerty was the aggressor. James was charged with assault and Finnerty was fined \$100 and ordered to keep the peace.

The Next Generation: Fruit to Flowers

James died in 1911 at the age of 58, leaving Hannah and 14 year old Jimmie to run the farm. They continued to develop the farm, but they also began to subdivide and sell portions of the property. The first plot to go was 10 acres of strawberries sold to Mr. W. Norman around 1913. Norman later sold to the Wenman family. Another 8 acres became the grounds of Hillcrest Elementary School. Hannah, having been raised on a farm in Ontario, was an excellent farmer, and in 1917 the farm was described as being 60-acres with 2 cows, 5 pigs, and 1 horse. They sold between 1800 and 2000 crates of strawberries per year, and about 6 tons of jam strawberries in addition to raising 20 acres of wheat and 8 tons of potatoes. By the 1920s, nearly 20 acres were dedicated to strawberries, and it is said that they had a friendly rivalry with their close friends and fellow strawberry farmers the Vantreights. The Houlihans sold their fruit through the Gordon Head Fruit Growers association which was at that time located at the corner of San Juan and Tyndall Avenues.



Saanich representatives of the Fruit Growers Association on Parliament building steps, 1915 (1983-011-003)



First Nations workers on strawberry farm in Gordon Head, probably Vantreight farm, ca. 1909 (2006-004-001)

When James died in 1911, 14-year-old Jimmie became a full time farmer, serving as the official head of the household. In 1917, he was brought in front of the Exemption Tribunal to request exemption from military service on the grounds of being the sole supporter of his mother and sister, claiming that without him there would be no one to work the farm. Jimmie was ultimately not exempt from service, however. He was drafted into the 2nd Depot Battalion, B.C. Regiment in May 1918 and sent to Vancouver. He served only a few months before being discharged during general demobilization in December 1918.

Number 3 COMPANY *Implicat*

11 M. D. 2nd Depot Battalion B.C. Regiment
Regl. No. 2139463

2nd DEPOT BATT. B.C. REGT.
PARTICULARS OF RECRUIT
DRAFTED UNDER MILITARY SERVICE ACT, 1917
(Class 1)

1. Surname.....	Houlihan
2. Christian name.....	William James
3. Present address.....	R.M.D.#4, Gordon Head, Victoria, B.C. Canada.
4. Military Service Act letter and number.....	522478
5. Date of birth.....	12 August 1898
6. Place of birth..... <small>(town, township or county and country)</small>	Gordon Head, Victoria, B.C. Canada.
7. Married, widower or single.....	Single
8. Religion.....	Roman Catholic
9. Trade or calling.....	Farmer
10. Name of next-of-kin.....	Mrs Hannah Houlihan
11. Relationship of next-of-kin.....	Mother
12. Address of next-of-kin.....	R.M.D.#4 Gordon Head, Victoria, B.C. Canada.
13. Whether at present a member of the Active Militia.....	No
14. Particulars of previous military or naval service, if any.....	None
15. Medical Examination under Military Service Act:— (a) Place..... (b) Date..... (c) Category.....	Victoria, B.C. 12 Oct. 1917. A-2

William James Houlihan attestation papers
(Library and Archives Canada, personnel records of the First World War)



Hannah died in October 1938 at the age of 74, and Jimmie and Mamie, neither of whom had married, continued to live and work on the farm. By the 1940s, at a time when many Gordon Head strawberry growers were having their crops destroyed by weevils and other pests, Jimmie turned to growing crocuses, daffodils, and tulips. Every spring, their hill above Ferndale Road was alight with yellow, purple, and white flowers. In the 1960s, Jimmie built an enormous house for his sister at the top of the hill but she died suddenly in 1968, having never lived in the house. It sat empty until it was demolished in the 1990s while Jimmie lived in a modest house at the bottom of the hill. Mamie was described in her obituary as being a kind, outgoing, and active member of the community.



Marguerite Smith admires the rows of crocuses at Houlihan farm (Daily Colonist, April 8, 1962)



Margaret Kirby, a student nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital, in a field of nearly 3 million blooms at Houlihan farm (Daily Colonist, 13 March 1963)

The Houlihan Legacy

In the 1970s, Jimmie sold the rights to log the 100 year old, second growth firs from a five-acre parcel of land to make room for the housing development around what is now Houlihan Place and Moonlight Crescent. By 1981 only 35 acres of the original 100 acre farm remained. Jimmie lived at the Houlihan home at 2133 Ferndale Road until his death in 1991. Today, the Houlihan family are still remembered in local names: Houlihan Place, Houlihan Court, Mamie Place, Hannah Court, Colleen Court (an infant Houlihan who died), and of course, Houlihan Park.