

How did Margaret Bay get its Name?

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Margaret Bay, 1900 (1984-012-007)

Since the first European families settled in Gordon Head in the 1850s, Margaret Bay, sometimes called Margaret's Bay, has been a favourite spot for summer recreation. Swimming, fishing, boating, and picnics on the beach have been common activities throughout the summer months. Dr. John Ash, after whom Ash Road is named, was responsible for cutting the first proper trail down to Margaret Bay and may also be responsible for giving the bay its name.

Around 1883 or 1884, Henry Dodd, son of early Gordon Head settler and Hudson's Bay Company officer Charles Dodd, sold his portion of the Dodd property to Dr. John Ash. He is said to have named the bay after Margaret Pollock, the daughter of the Pollock family (after whom Pollock Road is named) who lived in the former Charles Dodd house from around 1874 until around 1900. The story goes that Ash took a group down for a day at the beach and before they left, he asked Margaret if she would like the bay named after her as a present.



Swim meet at Margaret Bay, 1910s (2014-008-094). Beginning in 1916, the Gordon Head Athletic Club offered twice-weekly swimming lessons led by W. T. Edwards at Margaret Bay.

Prior to the 1920s, landowners who owned large tracts along the seafront in Gordon Head were content to allow children access to the beach through their property, but an increasing population made this a burden and local children were finding old paths closed. To create access to the widely-used Margaret Bay, Dr. Kenneth Campbell purchased part of Sarah Finlayson's property, which had been owned by her parents Roderick and Sarah Finlayson since 1858, and set aside a strip of land extending from Ferndale Road to the sea for public use. This later became Balmacarra Road. A connection with the Finlayson family is the source of another proposed origin for the name Margaret Bay. This version claims that the bay was named after Margaret Finlayson, another daughter of Roderick and Sarah, at the time when the strip of land at Balmacarra Road was set aside. However, because the name was in use long before this path was established, this origin story is less likely. The name Balmacarra Road, however, is assuredly tied to the Finlayson family; it is named after the place in Scotland where Roderick Finlayson was born.

In 1934, the federal government adopted the name St. Margaret Bay on their official maps, though they didn't offer a specific origin of that name. It remained in official use until 1954, when it reverted to Margaret Bay, that having been the name established and used by the locals since the 1890s. Though sometimes still referred to as Margaret's Bay, the official name according to BC Geographical Names is Margaret Bay, while the beach access owned by Saanich is officially called Balmacarra Park.



Charles Aitkens holding his young sister Lorna at Margaret Bay, 1923 (2016-017-137)



Eustace Estlin at Margaret Bay, 1923 (2016-017-008)