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# Gabriola's ambulance service— the first 25 years, 1969–94

by Jenni Gehlbach

*I am grateful to Robert and Betty Castell, Peter Boorer, and George Westarp for sharing their reminiscences about the early years of Gabriola's Ambulance Society. The written records of the Society, which I also used in my research, have been transferred to the archives of Gabriola's Museum.*

The early settlers on Gabriola were a tough bunch, birthing their babies alone or with a neighbour's help, and surviving, or not, the various illnesses and injuries they suffered while clearing and farming their land. Roads were few and rough, horses were slow, and reaching the medical services in Nanaimo required the help of those who had boats. It's hard to imagine now.

Recalling the early 1900s, Alison Law told June Harrison that she could remember going:<sup>1</sup>

...once only to the north end to get a cow from Harry Howie. It was an all-day trip and it took a long time to travel on the roads and bring the animal back. We went to Nanaimo perhaps once a month.

Most families used home remedies when sick, and rarely, if ever, saw a doctor or a dentist. Emergencies required the help of friends and neighbours—Frisco Jack (John Henry Easthom, born 1888) told June: “old Mrs Griffiths, she had asthma, we would have to rush her into town late at night” and this would require an uncomfortable journey on rough roads followed by a bumpy ride in a small boat.<sup>2</sup>

Before there were first responders and an ambulance, whoever came upon the scene of

an accident or illness would take action, and if transportation were needed, someone with a pickup truck would be called to take the patient to a boat and thence to the Nanaimo hospital. Jimmy Rollo recounted:<sup>3</sup>

In those days, people travelled to Nanaimo by their own boats, or had a ride with someone else who had a boat. Rowboats, sailboats, canoes...you were on your own. There used to be boathouses and stables at the wharf at Descanso. Bob Hoggan was the first to have a launch; he had the *Bessie* and the *Mary*, with a scow for towing. It used to cost 25¢ to go both ways. Then [at the south end] the Degdens had the *Patsy*, and the Grays and the Petersons had a boat, of course. Billie Stephenson also had his boat. The south enders would go their way to town, and the north end settlers their way.

Hazel Windecker (née Cox) told me that when she was a child in the 1930s she fell on a log and got a big gash in her leg. Her father backpacked her across a log boom in Cox Bay<sup>4</sup> to a moored fishboat, which then ferried them to Nanaimo, where her father again packed her uptown to the doctor's office.

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<sup>3</sup> June Harrison, *The People...*, p.59.

<sup>4</sup> This bay, northeast of Descanso Bay, was first known as “Hoggan Bay” after pre-emptor Alexander Hoggan, but the Cox family usually called it “Paradise Bay” when they lived there. Others called it “Cox Bay” and later in its history it was referred to locally as “Peacock's Bay”.

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<sup>1</sup> June Lewis-Harrison, *The People of Gabriola*, p.69, Friesen & Sons, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> June Harrison, *The People...*, p.91.

Several generations of Gabriolans suffered their medical emergencies in similar ways and Bill Coats used his boat *Sealure* to rush many sick and injured people to Nanaimo before the first ferry *Atrevida* went into service in 1931. Even after the ferry service started, without a doctor on the island, transportation to doctors or hospital could be a problem. Bea Meyer<sup>5</sup> told me that, when she went into labour with her third child Gwen in 1949, the ferry was out of service. Her husband Lou fetched two neighbours who were nurses to help, but after the baby was safely delivered, there was a complication, so they called Dr. Blott in Nanaimo, who came straightaway across to Gabriola on a tugboat and was driven to the Meyers' house by a neighbour. After tending to Bea, the doctor figured she needed more rest than she'd get at home, so he packed her and the baby up and took them on the tugboat back across to Nanaimo and drove them to the hospital.

John Capon also has a "do-it-yourself-ambulance" story. In July 1951, when he was 11, he fell out of a tree and broke his leg in four places. Dr. Fred Laird, a US obstetrician, who owned an orchard and holiday place near Berry Point Road gave him a shot of morphine, strapped him on to an old army folding cot and they carried him to the road where he was put into the back of his Aunt Suzanne Jackson's Studebaker and driven to the Nanaimo hospital via the ferry.

Sheila Bradley (née Easthom) recalls that in the days of the old crank phones, an emergency call would be sent out with six

<sup>5</sup> Bea told me that she and her husband Lou Meyer came to Gabriola in 1948, when there were only 350 people here. At first Lou worked cleaning up their previously logged land on Coast Road, and Tim Brown transported the wood waste down to the brickyard to be used as fuel. After the brickyard closed in 1952, Lou worked as a shipwright at Withey's Shipyard.

short rings and one long one. Everyone would get on the line and whoever was closest to the emergency and had some medical background would take whatever vehicle they had and deal with it. Some years later, when there was an emergency call, several phones at key points on the island would ring (at Henry Halverson's store at Silva Bay, Lois Rowan's house, Sheila's store at Twin Beaches, and the T&T service station owned by Ted Easthom and Ted James). Again, whoever was closest to the emergency would deal with it—and this included everyone going over to Mudge to fight a fire. Fire fighting and emergency medical care were performed by volunteers as needed, without formal organization, and operating only on donated money.

### **Gabriola's first Fire Protection District**

In 1967, the informal group of volunteer fire fighters on Gabriola acquired an old firetruck from Diamond Improvement District. An official Gabriola Fire Protection District was first proposed that year,<sup>6</sup> and, as always on this island, controversy and rumours of hidden agendas abounded.

A "Special Notice to Gabriola Ratepayers re: Gabriola Fire Protection District" appeared in the *Sandstone News* in September 1967, stating:

<sup>6</sup> The August 1967 edition of the *Sandstone News* reported that "Norm Nash, Howard Epton, Doug Williams, Peter Bell, Eric Chamberlain, Al Springett, Walter Krull, Burk Burkholder, and Bob Whitmore were chosen as an organization committee to look after matters relative to incorporation" of Gabriola under the provincial Water Act for fire protection purposes, which would enable access to tax-based financial aid rather than relying only on voluntary contributions to buy, maintain, and insure fire-protection vehicle and gear.

In recent weeks rumours have been circulating the island that the proposed Fire Protection District is:

- a) hiding other local improvements behind fire protection
- b) making an installation costing \$40,000.

NEITHER OF THESE STATEMENTS ARE FACT

Your organizing committee when circulating the petition will seek your consent to apply to the Provincial Government for Letters Patent to incorporate our district for Fire Protection Only....

...the length of the island precludes a single Firehall and some costs will be high because of the duplication; for example land, firehalls, and alarm systems....

In May 1968, 35 men and women adopted a constitution for the Volunteer Fire Department, its training to be organized under Lt. Tom McDonald of the Nanaimo Fire Dept.<sup>7</sup> Harrison "Burk" Burkholder was elected as Chief, and Gerry Rowan and Ted Easthom as Captains. Volunteers raised money to pay for and maintain their firetruck, planning to hand it and its equipment over to an Incorporated Fire District, when it was formed.

However, a referendum that summer about forming "Gabriola Fire Protection District" failed. People at the north end of the island voted 147 to 42 in favour, but those at the south end voted 73 to 23 against. After two years of conflict, amidst petitions and counter-petitions, the North Gabriola Fire Protection District was established by plebiscite in August 1969 (187 to 47 in favour, as reported in the *Sandstone News*).

The District covered only the portion of Gabriola "lying north of a line drawn from the top of Brickyard Hill Road in the West, to the centre of the island on the Gulf side". Victoria notified the North Gabriola Fire

<sup>7</sup> Reported in the *Sandstone News*, May 1968.

Protection District that their equipment could not be moved out of their own district (except by the Civil Defence or Department of Forestry), though nothing could prevent individual fire fighters helping to fight a fire outside of their district.

Peter Boorer<sup>8</sup> told me that when there was a fire at the south end, they would take the firetruck to the edge of their territory, then "chuck all the gear into the back of a truck" and just go fight the fire unofficially. Betty Castell, who arrived on Gabriola in 1967, said in a taped interview<sup>9</sup> that she remembers thinking this north-south division was absurd, saying: "this island's three miles wide, ten miles long and they have a division!"<sup>10</sup>

## Gabriola's first ambulance—1969

The volunteer fire crew was well aware of the need for emergency first-aid and for getting the sick and injured quickly and safely to the hospital, so they took action. A

<sup>8</sup> Peter Boorer shared his reminiscences about the early days of Gabriola's Ambulance Society and fire department in a conversation with me on October 2, 2008. He and his wife Millie (now deceased) came to Gabriola with their two sons in 1970 when Peter was 44, and they joined the two organizations almost immediately. Peter said his wife was also a volunteer firefighter, as were several other island women because they were often more readily available than their working husbands.

<sup>9</sup> Robert and Betty Castell's comments and reminiscences about Gabriola Volunteer Ambulance Corps' early years were collected in a taped discussion at their home with George Westarp, Tawny Capon, and Liz Ciocea. This tape and its transcription (kindly done by Phyllis Fafard) are now held in the Archives at the Gabriola Museum.

<sup>10</sup> According to Rick Jackson, the division effectively persisted until the South End Firehall was built in 1979 to comply with the requirement for halls to be within five miles of their service areas.



A rare picture of Gabriola's first ambulance shown here on the left in the #1 Fire Hall. Although once a hearse, it was white. This historic picture was found pinned up above the desk of Rick Jackson, Gabriola's current Fire Chief. Comfortable chairs were available for those on duty.

letter circulated to Gabriolans early in 1970 by Fire Chief Burkholder said:

Quite recently the members of the Volunteer Fire Department decided they would like to become the godfathers of an Ambulance Corps complete with ambulance, oxygen equipment, and first-aid equipment, to be at the disposal of the residents of our island.

No sooner said than done, the island is now in possession of an ambulance; not fancy, but it runs. A small group of interested firemen compose the nucleus of the Ambulance Corps, a small group because we do not...have too many men to spare.

They immediately ordered oxygen equipment, vowing to acquire first-aid equipment as soon as possible. They had borrowed \$1000 from the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) in the name of the Volunteer Fire Department to buy what was needed to equip the ambulance until a new organization could be formed under the Societies Act with the express purpose of

providing emergency ambulance service to the community. Bob Castell recalled:

Oh it was Burkholder's idea. He started the Fire Department too. We had a meeting down there and he says, "I think we should have an ambulance and he pointed at me and says 'you're it'...". And then he went and bought this hearse.



A flashier version of the Buick Roadmaster wagon used as Gabriola's first ambulance

Yes, the ambulance donated by the firemen was a decommissioned hearse—a 1950 Buick Roadmaster Straight-8 (#15620434),<sup>11</sup> which Burkholder had bought from Norm Nash<sup>12</sup> for \$125.

Burkholder took out comprehensive vehicle and liability insurance for the Buick on May 7, 1969—for a total premium of \$252 after the insurance agent had “some difficulty with the insuring company over the premium rate”. The name of the insured was left blank until the society became incorporated and the policy could be suitably endorsed.

Bob Castell recalled that the Straight-8 had a purple velvet interior. It was in pretty rough shape, but mechanic George Hague soon put it into working order. Burkholder proudly announced:

The boys on the Fire Department reached into their own pockets and dug up the ambulance, the licence, and the necessary basic repairs... George Hague promised faithfully that our new baby (the ambulance) shall receive tender loving care and shall be watched over like a hen watches over her one chick.

This Buick made its first emergency call on Gabriola at two in the morning of April 7, 1969, after a man had a heart attack.

<sup>11</sup> The Buick Straight-8 engine (Fireball 8) was produced from 1931 to 1953 and sold in Buick automobiles. The last year for Buick's Straight-8 was 1953. Roadmasters produced between 1936 and 1958 were built on Buick's longest wheelbase and shared its basic structure with senior Oldsmobiles. Between 1946 and 1957, the Roadmaster was Buick's premium and best-appointed model. The 1953 Buick Roadmaster station wagon, Model 79-R, was the last wood-bodied station wagon mass-produced in the United States. Its body was a product of Iona Manufacturing, which built all Buick station wagon bodies between 1946 and 1964. Wikipedia

<sup>12</sup> Norm and Ruth Nash owned Surf Lodge at the time.

According to the accident record, he was given “nitro” pills and oxygen and was:

...taken to Nanaimo in Mr Burkholder's station wagon by Bob Castell accompanied by wife. Transferred to Nanaimo ambulance at the ferry dock in Nanaimo.

Often the Buick was parked in the Castells' yard on Horseshoe Road between calls. Apparently its starter was hidden under the gas pedal, and Castell recalled that Jimmy Rollo had to get Castell's daughter Debbie (who was 14 at the time) out of bed during a snowstorm to show him how to start it.

Right from the beginning, the ambulance service covered the whole island. By the end of 1969, the Straight-8 had made fourteen calls to tend four heart attacks, one stroke, a back injury, a car accident with undetermined injuries, a near drowning, two arm injuries, a bee sting, lung trouble, a suspected hip fracture, and abdominal pain with vomiting.

Castell recalled that after one emergency call, Ted (“Fats”) Easthom more or less “came straight out of the greasepit” at T&T and into the hearse to pick up a patient, who said that when she saw him she wasn't alarmed—she thought he was “a big black angel”.

In one case that first year, the patient refused the ambulance, but oxygen was taken to his home as a precaution. In another, the patient had been taken by boat from a tugboat to Silva Bay where two Vancouver doctors administered first-aid before Bob Castell and William Thorne drove him to Nanaimo Hospital in the ambulance. Castell recalls that they were once stopped for speeding through Nanaimo—the police didn't believe the hearse was an ambulance. He also recalled: “The ambulance never gave us any trouble going to the hospital but it never started at the hospital”.

Other drivers and attendants manning the ambulance in 1969 were Dan Brake, Heloise Johnson, George Hague, Pam Fairchild, Herb Kittel, Burk Burkholder, Jim Brown, Dimitri Chernoff, Ted Easthom, George and Dave Mathieson, William Hastings, Gerry Rowan, Charles Hague, Frances MacDonald. and Mrs. Caroline Atkinson.

## The Ambulance Society's first board and constitution

Although Gabriola's firemen and others were already performing ambulance duties with their hearse in the spring of 1969, they needed to formalize an organization to run the service. A notice appeared in Gabriola's monthly *Sandstone News* in June 1969:

Gabriola Volunteer Ambulance  
Steering Committee appointed for  
July/August.

Twenty-six residents attended the first public meeting June 19th at the Community Hall. It was the unanimous opinion by those present that the election of officers to manage this new organization should be postponed pending better representation by the citizens of the island. However a proposal from the floor that a temporary steering committee be appointed was accepted and the following residents agreed to perform this duty:

Col. Wm. Matthews  
Mr. George Hague  
Mrs. W.R. Stokes  
Mr. H.E. Burkholder.

At this first meeting, the need for first-aid courses was discussed. Burkholder acknowledged donations of cash and equipment and thanked Bob Castell and George Hague for getting the ambulance "ready for the road", and he also thanked Simpsons-Sears department store for sharing the cost of new tires.

At a full public meeting of the ambulance society, chaired by Colonel W.H.V.

Matthews<sup>13</sup> in the Community Hall on October 15, 1969, Daryl Bate reported on the finances of the temporary ambulance committee, and it was decided to form a permanent ambulance society. Its first Board of Directors, elected for a three-year term, was:

President: Robert (Bob) B. Castell, a shipwright who lived on Horseshoe Road.  
Treasurer: Henry C. Halverson, retired, of Silva Bay.  
Secretary: Dan S. Brake, a consultant, of North Road.  
Directors: George Hague, a mechanic, of North Road.  
Frank Hiley, the postmaster, of Berry Point Road.  
Mrs. Joan Hopkin, a housewife, of Bevmaryl Crescent.

Lieutenant Bob Castell<sup>14</sup> had taken an active leadership role from the beginning and was to serve on the board for seventeen years, mostly as chairman.

At that first public meeting, the board was authorized to request the forms for incorporation under the Societies Act, and after discussing the likely cost of operating the service, William Y. Hopkin moved (seconded by A.C. Wall) that "Mr. Frank Ney [Nanaimo's mayor] be approached with a view to removing or reducing the \$20 charge for the emergency use of the ferry".

The board soon met again at Castell's house on October 28 and November 12 to draft a

<sup>13</sup> No relation to the well-known Major Matthews, founder of the City of Vancouver Archives. Col. Matthews was Sue deCarteret's father.

<sup>14</sup> Robert and Betty Castell arrived on Gabriola on Labour Day 1967, and Bob worked for the first few years at Withey's Shipyard. He said "Yeah. Oh yeah. They used to build a lot of things. Good boats, big boats. It was a really thriving business at one time."

Constitution, and by November 28, 1969, the Gabriola Island Volunteer Ambulance Corps (GVAC) received its Certificate of Incorporation, No. 8584, under BC's Societies Act.

GVAC's stated objective was "to provide ambulance service to the residents of Gabriola Island" and its operations were to be "chiefly carried out between Gabriola Island [and] Nanaimo Regional Hospital".

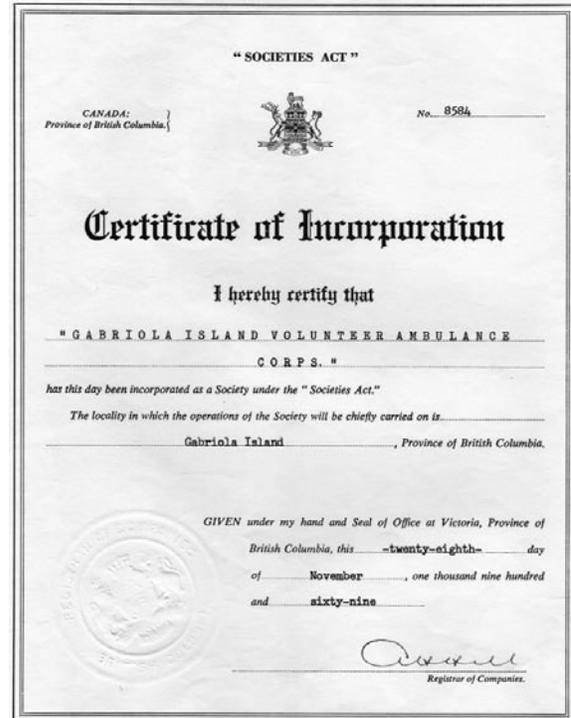
Membership dues were to be \$5 per annum per family, entitling them to free emergency ambulance service to the hospital. Non-members would be charged an ambulance fee of \$20. The ambulance attendants would all be volunteers.

On December 9, 1969, The District Superintendent in the Department of Highways wrote to GVAC:

In reply to your letter...we would advise that the Gabriola Island Ambulance may use the Gabriola Island Ferry toll free while it is necessary to do same on an emergency call.

In this initial period, GVAC Directors established that ambulance calls should be given priority over fire calls if the ambulance was leased to the Fire Department.

They clarified their financial status with Burkholder and Bate (their cash balance was now only \$420), and our time-honoured Gabriolan generosity went immediately into play with fund-raising. The families of ambulance patients wrote grateful letters, enclosing cheques. Gabriola Mothers Group donated \$10 through Margaret Mathieson, and other money donations small and large were solicited and thankfully acknowledged. GVAC Directors donated items ranging from a handmade wooden bowl to cans of paint to be raffled (raising \$63) on December 13, 1969, at the first of many



The GAS's certificate of incorporation as the Gabriola Island Volunteer Ambulance Society on November 28, 1969.

memorable GVAC Christmas parties, nearly all held at Surf Lodge.

Within a year the Society had received over \$700 in donations, which they used to pay down their \$1000 bank loan. They had also received \$575 in membership fees.

A siren was needed for the hearse (at first, there was no siren or red light) and there was a chance to buy a second hand one from Richmond Fire Department, so young Kevin Shaw raised the money by auctioning off his cake at his twelfth birthday party at The Grandee (owned by his father Tommy Shaw).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Peter Boorer told me the Grandee was the main island meeting place on a Saturday night in those days. He and his wife Millie often went and played shuffleboard there. If Tommy and Eva Shaw were away on holiday, their brother looked after the place,

There are lots of humorously alarming stories about those early ambulance calls with untrained attendants. The guys “drove like heck” and the police gave up trying to escort them through Nanaimo.

Betty Castell recalled that once she and another crewmember went to pick up a patient from Silva Bay and on their way to the ferry with Mrs X on the stretcher in the back and Mr X (who was fairly poorly himself) accompanying her, they came across a woman whose truck had been T-boned turning out of a driveway. Betty Castell said:

Mrs X., who was having a heart attack, said, “Oh she can have the stretcher”. Anyway we put Mrs. Y in the front seat. I mean...neither Jim nor I knew anything much about first-aid at all. It was just a matter of somebody to pick people up... But we did the right thing as it happened because she had a punctured lung.

So with five people crammed into the hearse they drove to Nanaimo Hospital and

...At the emergency ward I had to ask the emergency nurse if she could bring a chair for Mr. X because I was afraid that he would keel over.

Another time, a youngster phoned in saying: “Uncle W’s dead, he’s laying on the floor and he’s dead.” Bob Castell said that the crew “roared down there, and there he was. Dead drunk.” Castell also recalled:

Never forget the time we had that heart attack there down on Berry Point Road, and the guy was in a lawn chair. We threw the stretcher on the ground, threw the lawn chair in with him in it and took him right in to the hospital in the lawn chair.

Good rural stories abound. Peter Boorer told me there were often accidents with

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and if someone ordered food, he’d call Millie to help out in the kitchen.

burning barrels. He had picked up “a guy who’d thrown some gas into the barrel to make it burn quicker”. He’d burned all the hair off his face and head and the crew took him to the hospital with “a damp rag over his face”.

Boorer had also attended a man drilling a test well down near Berry Point, who was burned when he lit a cigarette over the hole causing a coal-gas explosion.<sup>16</sup>

Another attendant recalled picking up a patient from a house with a large apple orchard—when the ambulance got stuck in the long wet grass, the patient wanted to get out and help push.

But this was also the time of the hippies on Gabriola, and Boorer said that they often picked up people stoned on magic mushrooms or other substances. He says one nurse at the hospital would just say “put ‘em in the corner” and would leave them there until they straightened out.

### *Getting a proper ambulance*

The hearse made 21 ambulance calls in 1970, and 18 in 1971. By May 1971, George Hague reported that the good old Buick would need replacing before long, and in December he said the replacement costs might be around \$4000, prompting a discussion of fund-raising. GVAC was always scrounging for money or in-kind support for day-to day operations, and Castell said:

We used to go around to the shipyards and try and get money to fill the gas tank. Some of them were cranky but they gave us money.

Bob also recalled that Mrs Stokes donated “all the blankets and stuff” for the hearse.

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<sup>16</sup> Boorer stated that the water wells near Berry Point were sour because they usually contained dissolved coal gas, saying that was why most people down there had cisterns.

But getting an ambulance was a big project, so George Basso volunteered to bring a load of herring into Degnen Bay after the New Year to raise money as a first step in the new ambulance campaign, and a bottle drive in January raised \$335. The Castells told of Bud Edgar's significant unwitting donation to this bottle drive, saying:

George backed into Edgar's garage...[for] a load of beer bottles and Edgar ran out and said, 'What are you doing George? You can't do that.' ... [George] said 'You just donated.' So there was a hundred and twenty five dozen beer bottles.

Bob Castell recalls that the T&T service station played a key role in the early ambulance service. Aside from their "grease monkeys" acting as attendant/drivers, the business often carried the tab for the ambulance's gas, and served as a storage facility during that big bottle drive, apparently filling both sides, with liquor bottles on one side and pop bottles on the other. The bottle drive was followed by film shows by Kavanagh and Campbell, raising \$144; whist drives at the Community Hall that produced \$128; and Lauri Ann Krull and Rita Jancowski raised \$569 with a round-the-island 19-mile walkathon that started on South Road near the Post Office. Donations were solicited and Bingo was played. By early 1972, they had accumulated \$1377 in the new ambulance fund.

But they had a timely stroke of luck when they heard that Qualicum Volunteer Ambulance Corps had a second-hand ambulance for sale. Castell said:

They phoned us up and said we have this van and we've written it off from the books. So we'll sell it to you for... the write-off value.... If you come up with a cheque you can take it out of here.

On January 20th 1972, the executive held an emergency telephone meeting to authorize purchase of the 1966 Meteor Amblewagon for the token price of \$840.<sup>17</sup> It went into service on Gabriola four days later. GVAC was concerned about how to operate if this vehicle broke down, and after needed repairs were done in 1973, the board decided that if the Meteor went out of service, they would hire "a U-drive vehicle". But the Meteor successfully made 94 calls by the time BC Emergency Health Services Commission took over the ambulance service in July 1974.

Insurance remained one of GVAC's main expenses. In 1972/3, the comprehensive vehicle and liability insurance premium for the Meteor was \$412. Of course, their first-aid equipment also had to be insured and this meant an additional cost of \$45 and medical malpractice insurance added another \$150. The vehicle insurance did not cover drivers under 25, which limited their ability to use young volunteers—a relief to some because, apparently, the youngsters had an irritating tendency to overuse the siren.

## **First-aid and nursing in the early years and Gabriola's first doctor**

### ***The Women's Institute's First-aid service***

In the late 1960s, two phone numbers were used for first-aid calls, one at the north end of Gabriola and one at the south. Stretchers and blankets were stored with Mrs. Bill Coats near the ferry terminal. Twin Beaches

<sup>17</sup> Although described as a 1966 "Ambuwagon" in the GVAC records, the vehicle was actually an "Amblewagon"—a Mercury stationwagon adapted for service as an ambulance by Automotive Conversion Corporation of Michigan and Ontario.

was the commercial hub of Gabriola's north end, and the Women's Institute were in charge of a First-aid Station there at the B & J Store (later known as the B & K).

It was financed through donations and operated as something of a triage point. Heloise Johnson, the nurse, tended minor injuries from burns to barnacle cuts with bandages, ointments, icepacks, and 222s, and more serious cases were sent to see a doctor or driven to the hospital. This nurse was pretty adaptable, dealing with irrational behaviour and athlete's foot, and even occasionally treating animals—in August 1970, she removed a fishhook from a dog's nostril, treating it with Neosporin™ for infection and one ounce of sherry for shock!

Caroline Atkinson performed similar services at the south end of Gabriola—both women being “voluntarily on call for 24 hours a day” according to Adeline Sowden writing in the first edition of the *Flying Shingle* in May, 1972. Sowden went on to report:

She [Heloise] has magnetic first-aid signs that can be put on her vehicle before she leaves on a call or sometimes casualties are treated right on the counter at the B & J Store. Her volunteer load is lighter since the doctor came to the island, but she still keeps a record of all calls she receives. Her main duty, after preliminary bandaging, is to send the injured person to Dr. Williams, or in severe cases, to call the ambulance to take them to Nanaimo. She also phones the particulars ahead to the hospital when necessary.

The Women's Institute had sent a letter to GVAC on November 4, 1970, requesting them to take over their First-aid kit, saying:

...if you decide to do this, we would be happy to donate an annual \$30.00 to the Ambulance Corps, and, further, that you take all the contributions from the box in the B &

J Store. Miss Heloise Johnson would continue to look after the first-aid for the Ambulance.

During the early days of the fire and ambulance services on Gabriola, there was no full-time doctor on the island though several of the women volunteers were trained nurses, and Peter Boorer told me that the Hileys, who operated the Post Office, were both trained midwives. But many GVAC volunteers responding to emergency calls did not have any first-aid training, and efforts were made to improve this situation. A notice appeared in the June 1969 *Sandstone News* about St John's Ambulance First-aid classes to be held at the Community Hall in July for “all interested”.

At the Ambulance Society's first AGM in October 1970, George Hague “directed some pointed remarks” to those who had complained about the attendants' qualifications, and Castell thanked all those involved. Pam Fairchild (a qualified nurse) was asked to give a class on the use of the ambulance's oxygen equipment, and the following year the Executive moved to have another first-aid course.

At the beginning of 1973 at the AGM, it was decided to investigate further St John's Ambulance courses and training for other higher qualifications. Refresher and First-aid courses were arranged early in 1974 and Miss Rutherford of “Disasters and Civil Defence” advised that ambulance training should include disaster training, which is more “serious”.

Bob Castell recalled one startling lesson from an off-island trainer:

One thing I remembered about that course was that they teach you how to open the door to go into a house, into a room. So he said to me, “Well you go open up that door there—there's somebody having a stroke in there.” So I opened up the door and [was] looking

right down the barrel of a .357. He says, "Now when you open the door, don't stand right in front of it".

### ***Gabriola's first doctor***

In November 1970, Dr. Leonard J. Williams, a retired chest surgeon, was a guest at a GVAC meeting where he gave suggestions and advice on carrying patients. His retirement didn't last long and he soon became Gabriola's first practising physician. He was highly thought of on the island, and Bob Castell humorously recalled:

He was the best doctor in the world... You'd walk in the door and he'd look at you... And you'd sit down and he'd tell you what was wrong... And then he'd take tests to prove it.

Dr. Williams' first recorded attendance at an ambulance call was on January 2, 1971, although after Bob Castell and Ted Easthom had administered oxygen to the patient, Williams advised that the ambulance was not required. During his practice on Gabriola, he and his wife Ann, a trained nurse, would often drive with the patients in the ambulance, and he was very supportive of the largely untrained crew. Castell said:

When you were all finished, you'd stop in the office the next day and say to Dr. Williams "Well OK, what goes on, what did we do right, wrong or otherwise". And he'd tell you right straight out... what you could have done better or what you did right.

### ***Equipment, volunteers, and deliveries***

At the second AGM in 1971, GVAC discussed the need for oxygen equipment to be carried in Dr. Williams' car. This was later bought for just over \$200, \$80 of which was donated by the Women's Institute, who also donated \$60 for a first-aid kit. As other donations and membership fees came in,

other essential items such as forceps were added to the ambulance's equipment.

Sid Skinner, Mike Lee, and Bob Castell were the proud volunteers on duty when the first baby was born in the ambulance (the Amblewagon, not the Buick hearse). Recalling the early days, George Williamson a later ambulance unit chief, told Joyce White:<sup>18</sup>

At year-end, attendants who had delivered a baby in the ambulance within the past year were awarded golden diaper pins. The babies got the best of the deal though, they got lifetime ferry passes for being born either on, or en route to, the ferry in the ambulance.

Peter Boorer told me that he worked with Castell's son-in-law, Mike Lee, delivering babies in the back of the ambulance. Chuckling, he recalled that when they picked up one woman in labour, she refused to get in the back of the ambulance, saying she'd rather sit up in front between the drivers with her "knees crossed and tied together than let you bastards deliver my baby".

Donations in kind and of money continued to arrive and the ambulance and fire department volunteers continued to fundraise to cover operating expenses and buy essential equipment. Boorer says that they held dances every second week for a while at the firehall to raise money and had "Granny Sales" where the women dressed up in granny gowns to sell donated items. He says they raised as much as \$1500 this way.

Early in 1973, Canadian Linens donated various linens including uniform coats, and Chairman Castell was authorized to buy a

<sup>18</sup> This information was in Joyce White's article *Above and beyond the call of duty* about Gabriola's ambulance service, published in the Gabriola edition of the *Nanaimo Times*, Feb.26, 1987.

bolt cutter, fire axe, come-along, shovel, and flares for road emergencies. A 1974 board decision to supply an oxygen unit on the ferry was subject to Department of Transport approval, which was eventually received. It was agreed that if the doctor left, he would leave \$75 with the society to replace the intravenous equipment in his office. In June 1975, a new stretcher was installed in the ambulance, and the old one stored at Dr. William's office with the IV-equipment. In October, Williams ordered a sphygmomanometer and a stethoscope for checking blood pressure.

Communication for fire and ambulance call-outs was managed using the "Tel-An" service in Nanaimo, who had a list of the Gabriola volunteers' numbers to call. Costs were shared 50:50 by GVAC and the Fire Department, but in 1974, due to cost acceleration, GVAC began to pay two thirds of this bill. Also, the highways department recommended carrying a two-way radio on the ambulance so that the ferry (the M/V *Westwood* in those days) could be on call at all times during service.

Although communication was possible through Air-Sea Rescue Service, it was much slower. In these early years, relations with the ferry captain and crew were excellent, and GVAC always bought them each a bottle of liquor at Christmas.

Periodically, the board published brochures or notices in the local papers to inform people of the services provided and encourage them to enrol their families for a \$5 fee. Membership in GVAC grew steadily and users were extremely grateful for the service. By January 1973, there were 235 members and GVAC now charged a \$30 fee to non-members for an ambulance call. Alphonse J. Bowden (retired) had joined the board, and the volunteer drivers included Ted James, Dave Mathieson, Sid Skinner,

George Mathieson, Bob Castell, George Hague, Mrs Myer, Herb Kittel, and Mike Lee. Bill Hopkin became the Chairman and President of the Board that year, his wife Joan continuing as Treasurer. Special thanks were given at the AGM to Bob Castell for his past volunteer services as Chairman and as an ambulance driver.

Many of the volunteer attendants also had paid jobs, and often they lost wages when leaving their work to make an ambulance call, so in 1973 GVAC agreed to reimburse drivers for their lost wages when they were called off their jobs. By now, all the ambulance drivers had their Class 4 licences and that year the emergencies dealt with by the crews ranged from a severely bleeding nose to a broken leg. Concerned about illness and injuries at job-sites, Jimmy Rowan of Rowan Excavating suggested that non-member workers should be covered if their employer paid the \$5 per head fee, and GVAC's constitution was changed accordingly. It was also decided to try to ensure that a woman attendant was in the ambulance when carrying female patients.

Our community should gratefully acknowledge the disruption in ordinary life that all these volunteers willingly suffered. They often had young families as well as their paid jobs, and also tried to have a normal social life with their friends—but the old Gabriolan can-do philosophy carried them through with good humour. Aileen Adams told me:

In the mid-70s we were at a dinner party on Seagirt Road—four men and four women. We were in the midst of our meal when beepers went off and three of the four men dashed out the door. The doctor, an ambulance attendant, and a fireman. The remaining man was distinctly uncomfortable that his services were not required!

## Government takes over— 1974

Gabriola's experience was pretty typical of rural BC before the 1970s, when BC's emergency pre-hospital medical services were supplied by a mixture of organizations and commercial operators, some operating from funeral homes, some partially subsidized by municipalities, some based with volunteer fire departments, and some existing on paid subscriptions from the public. In "Health Security for British Columbians", his report to the Minister of Health in the early 1970s, R.G. Foulkes recommended that:

...the fractionated ambulance services provided by private companies, volunteer agencies, and municipal fire departments be amalgamated under one jurisdiction.

As a result, the 1974 Health Emergency Act replaced the Ambulance Service Act and established the Emergency Health Services Commission (EHSC), which in turn created the BC Ambulance Service on July 4, 1974.

EHSC was mandated to ensure provision of high quality and consistent levels of pre-hospital emergency health care services throughout the province. Before July 1974, Bob Castell, Bill Hopkin, and Frank Hiley had prepared a brief including a letter from Dr. Williams about services needed on Gabriola and a July 30 general meeting was proposed for GVAC members and other Gabriolans to discuss these services with Government representatives.

By the time the Government took over Gabriola's ambulance service, GVAC had made 144 volunteer ambulance calls and had acquired a vehicle and a good supply of equipment. BC Ambulance Service agreed to pay GVAC for its ambulance and the equipment in it, but payment was slow—the money didn't come until late in 1975.

Castell still worried about the mechanical condition of the ambulance, but in 1975 EHSC promised that a relief ambulance would be on the next ferry in the event of a breakdown. Knowing that our emergency vehicle was secure, the funds that GVAC had previously put aside for a new ambulance were shifted into the Society's general fund.

To Gabriolans, all seemed as before—the ambulance service was still effectively operated by GVAC's team of volunteers, although they made regular reports to EHCS about all ambulance calls. The Government wanted to formally pay the crew, but they were adamant that they wished to remain volunteers. They had to submit pay-roll slips with a "reasonable statement" of their hours worked to EHCS, who agreed to send the volunteers' pay directly to GVAC, to be used for health-related benefits and services to the community. Thus the volunteer drivers and attendants continued to be the major donors to the society for several years. Increasingly in this period, people started to refer to the organization as the *Gabriola Ambulance Society*, but the legally registered name of the society remained *Gabriola Island Volunteer Ambulance Corps*, even after the crew started being paid several years later.

The Executive elected for 1975 was: Chair, Bob Castell; Secretary, Kathy Hiley; Treasurer, Joan Hopkin; Directors, George Hague, Frank Hiley, Ron Williams, and Mike Hale. Bowden resigned from the board but remained supportive of their activities. More ambulance drivers and attendants were needed and at the January 1975 AGM, volunteers included: Peter Boorer, Doris Bruner, M. Bruner, Mel Dennstedt, A. Thompson, Richard (Rick) Avramenko, and Kathy Hiley, who was no longer working (for pay) and therefore more

available. Ann Hill offered nursing help, Mary William phone help, and Mary Dodds said she could work as a home-aide. Mike Hale was appointed Director of Drivers and did the liaison work with EHSC. Peter Boorer and Bob Castell, who together by then owned Gabriola Electric, both carried pagers all the time and became the chief contact people for Tel-An for several years.

Dr. Williams was asked to purchase two airways (adult and child), a box lock for holding the jaw open, a tongue clamp, a tracheotomy tube, a power-operated suction pump, 6 blankets, 2 pillows and plastic cases, 1 dozen triangular bandages, a spare cylinder for the small oxygen dispenser, 2 handles for the small oxygen tank, and 4 first-aid kits.

At a February meeting at the Fire Hall, Williams instructed the crew how to insert the airways and administer oxygen, pointing out the need to keep the equipment together. Meetings with EHSC to discuss training of drivers and attendants established that at that time the crew did not need Class 4 Driving Licences or Industrial First-aid training. However, this was felt to be unsatisfactory and after attending a paramedics' training course, Rick Avramenko offered to train the other Gabriola volunteers.

Essential equipment for the ambulance service was ordered through EHSC and paid for by them, but in 1975, GVAC wrote to EHSC complaining that ordered supplies had not arrived, and in April, they'd had to borrow from their term deposit to pay their bills because EHSC reimbursements for legitimate expenses had not arrived. After a lack of response to letters and calls, they decided to double-register a letter to the Minister of Health demanding payment and if there was no response to this, to "take it to the Jack Webster radio show" (which proved unnecessary). In November 1975, the

Government finally paid GVAC \$2457 for the ambulance and its equipment, and the extra money was placed in a term deposit.

At the end of 1975, GVAC received a formal letter of appreciation to all ambulance personnel from Peter Ransford of BC EHSC. The ambulance was still in pretty good shape, although it had no room for a second stretcher if there were two patients at once. In that case the crew had to ditch some of the equipment to make room. Chairman Castell hoped there'd be a new ambulance soon, when they could possibly keep the current one as a spare. When the Government finally supplied a new ambulance, its design proved unsuitable for some ferry transfers—in mid October 1976, we read in the board meeting minutes that "Car #267 was exchanged for #268 to ease loading and unloading at low tide".

### ***Emergency short-term homecare and donation to Kiwanis Lodge***

The 1975 treasurer's report showed that the volunteer drivers had donated pay worth \$2680, and GVAC had paid out only \$689. Without the expense of providing an ambulance and all its equipment, GVAC could expand its role in the community as membership fees and donations accumulated. They continued to buy equipment to enhance the ambulance service and improve local first-aid, and to subsidize the cost of training the volunteers in first-aid techniques. Now, in response to a need in the community, GVAC was asked to look into the possibility of providing emergency homecare nursing.

In April 1975, Kathy Hiley talked with the organizers of the homemaker services at the Nanaimo Hospital and at Nanaimo Health Centre about how their systems operated, and Pam Fairchild (an RN) was chosen to coordinate such a service on Gabriola with

FORM 10  
(Sections 66 and 67)

Certificate of  
Incorporation No. 8584-1

SOCIETIES ACT

**COPY OF RESOLUTION**

The following is a copy of  
a special resolution\* passed  
~~an ordinary resolution~~  
~~a directors' resolution~~  
in accordance with the by-laws of the Society on the fifteenth day of August, 1978:

"RESOLVED that the Gabriola Volunteer Homemaker Service (providing a maximum of 10 days service on a Doctor's recommendation, free to members of the Gabriola Island Volunteer Ambulance Corps) become a branch of the Gabriola Island Volunteer Ambulance Corps.

resolved that the Gabriola volunteer Homemaker service include provision of service under the Government Long-Term Care Program 9/6/78

Dated the First day of September, 1978

FILED AND REGISTERED  
September 20/78  
M. A. Jorre de St. Jorre  
REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES

Gabriola Island volunteer Ambulance Corps  
(Name of Society)

by Kathleen J. Hiley  
(Signature)

Secretary  
(Relationship to Society)

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES

\* Strike out words which do not apply.  
[NOTE—(a) No special resolution has effect until accepted by the Registrar of Companies.  
(b) Send in duplicate to the Registrar of Companies, Victoria, together with \$5 Certification Fee.]

patients to initiate the request for service through their doctor.

This new short-term emergency homecare service proved very valuable in the community, and by mid-1977, GVAC reported that “the ladies have given 236 hours of homecare service (recorded) since 1975”. It was not just a matter of helping with personal care and basic housework; sometimes children were involved, needing care when their parents were sick or injured. As always, the community kicked in with practical support as well as money—in 1977 Kathy Hiley received a letter from June Harrison:

Dear Kath  
If there is a situation where a patient is taken to hospital and there are small children needing immediate care, I would be happy to assist by having them in my home until alternative measures are found.

GVAC also made other valuable contributions to the community. In April 1976, they donated \$1000 to furnish

When the Government created the BC Ambulance Service in 1974, the GVAC redirected its energy into provision of other health-related services for islanders, most notably, homecare, started on August 15, 1978, by the above amendment to the GVAC constitution. In 1987, homecare services became the responsibility of a separate society (GHCS).

Kathy's help. By September, they had set up an emergency homecare program under which, on a doctor's recommendation, all GVAC members were entitled to two hours per day of free homecare service for up to ten days. This would also be available to non-member Gabriolans for a nominal fee. A letter was sent to local physicians describing the service available to their patients and saying that the onus was on

a room at Kiwanis Lodge on behalf of the volunteer drivers. A few smaller donations were also made to local people in personal crises of various kinds. Donations of money and equipment also continued to be received by GVAC—for example, Mrs Allen donated a wheelchair and monkey bars to be kept at the firehall with other equipment and loaned out as needed.

Day to day organization was constantly under discussion within GVAC and between the Society and Emergency Health Services. For example, EHSC wrote requesting that patients be transferred to a Nanaimo ambulance at the ferry dock in Nanaimo, which was considered ill-advised, and discussions with the attendants about this issue continued. GVAC complained about the inefficiencies of the Tel-An answering service, even briefly considering setting up a local service. Mr. Murray of Tel-An, told the GVAC that his "girls were efficient on the job and it was nearly always difficult to reach a crew on Gabriola". Hale asked if the crew could be given the number of the party calling, to get more precise directions if needed. Avramenko tried out a pager for the Fire Department that could be rented for \$32 per month but the crew found them unsatisfactory, and rental was discontinued.

In 1976, the ambulance crew answered 98 calls and the society still needed to find more drivers and attendants to man the ambulance round the clock. In this period, GVAC rented Agi Hall (for \$2.50 a night) to present a St John's Ambulance First-aid Course for crewmembers. The ferry service and crew continued to be very co-operative, turning out repeatedly at night to take emergency cases across to Nanaimo and making special arrangements as needed. For example, in October 1977, while the ferry car ramp was out of service, a fully equipped and heated ambulance was kept on board the relief vessel to transfer patients to Nanaimo.

But then as now, there were always concerns about the possible unavailability of the ferry or its slowness. Helicopter evacuation seemed an obvious option. In 1976, the Fire Department gave permission for a helicopter pad to be installed on their property and in July 1977, when the Ministry of Transport

approved the site provided that it was cleared of a small group of trees and levelled, Rick Avramenko volunteered to level the site. Other work that had to be done included installing lights on the firehall roof, moving an antenna to the front of the building, and surfacing the pad with gravel and concrete or paving. Rowan Excavating did some of the work and although Mr. McLean of EHSC had assured GVAC in the summer of 1977 that they would help with the costs, letters had to be written late in 1978 to clarify how and when this payment would be made. This helicopter landing pad was used only a few times because the lights were later judged inadequate.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, constant appeals through notices in the newspaper and circulated brochures sought volunteer crew, homecare workers, and new members, explaining the work of GVAC and the advantages of membership. By 1977, there were 300 paid-up members and the names on the list of volunteers with nursing skills included: Jo Kenny, Caroline Atkinson, Muriel Boulton, Bea Owen, Joyce Kaye, Ann Hill, Leona Lockhart, Pam Fairchild, Eleanor White, Beth McDonald, Norma Goodall, Barbara Upton, Ruth Lembke, Jean Ott, Ellie Green, Ann Williams, and Sue Finchard. Meanwhile, the generosity of the volunteer crew continued, and when Mike Hale returned his reimbursed expense money, GVAC donated it to the Lions Club for the orthodontal case they were supporting.

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<sup>19</sup> Liz Ciocea told me that with the larger helicopters now used for medivac work, the pilots prefer not to land near trees at night. On the rare occasion when a helicopter is needed at night on Gabriola nowadays, it lands at Rollo McClay Park, where the required special lighting system is in place.

### *Finding a new doctor*

In July 1975, Dr. Williams announced that he'd be retiring soon. He and his wife had been huge assets for GVAC in its early years, and at the fourth AGM compliments and thanks were offered to them for "work over and above the usual". He continued to serve on the board in an advisory capacity and had remained as an Honorary Director after the Province took over the service. When he announced his retirement, he said he would not leave the island without a doctor and would serve until a replacement was found, but he was not well, and in the late summer of 1975, this notice appeared on the Medical Clinic's door:

#### IMPORTANT NOTICE

Doctor Leonard Williams is ceasing clinical practice of medicine on Gabriola Island in the very near future. Doctor and Mrs. Williams are taking a most deserving and needed holiday. The office will be closed from September 2nd 1975 until further notice.

This leaves Gabriola without every-day and emergency medical services. Therefore, the co-operation of the general public is requested until such time a doctor is available in the community.

Gabriola is blessed with a well-trained, dedicated ambulance corps. As in the past, you will have to depend on them and the ferry crew. A decision will have to be made whether or not an emergency exists so that unnecessary trips by ambulance are not made. Your co-operation is therefore requested in this respect.

In the meantime, you can help by appealing to [the BC Minister of Health, BC Minister of Agriculture, and the Registrar of the BC College of Physicians and Surgeons] to assist in acquiring a residential medical doctor.

This notice is issued as a result of a meeting of the following people:

Mr. Peter, Boorer; Capt. Clarence Callow;<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Verna Fenney; Mrs. Kathleen Hiley; Miss Joyce Lockwood; Dr. Leonard Williams and Mr. Bob Vezina.

A notice in the newspaper<sup>21</sup> reminded Gabriolans and visitors that they could call the ambulance without a doctor's approval, saying: "Emergency calls are received by Tel-An in Nanaimo, who have detailed instructions for the dispatch of drivers, attendants, and Gabriola ambulance".

Dr. Williams continued to order needed equipment and said in January 1976 that any equipment stored in his office could stay there even though he was retired. So far there had been no definite response to the letters that GVAC had written to the Ministry of Health and Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons requesting a replacement doctor for Gabriola.

Gabriola was without a doctor for a year, but by the Fall of 1976, Dr. Damian Metten was practising full-time on the island, though he found it hard to make a good living. The difficulties about funding for doctors and health care, and convincing Victoria of the special needs of Gabriola when Dr. Metten practised here sound very familiar. George Westarp recalls:

It was surprising 'cause I went down when Dr. Metten had been here two years. He couldn't make ends meet. So he was going to leave. And so we wrote a couple of letters down to Victoria and met...with the deputy Minister of Health. And they did more or less what we asked. Dr. Metten...said their original argument was that we ...weren't isolated....and we said, "Oh come on. We're roughly an hour away from the hospital...if everything goes well—and if everything doesn't go well, it's longer. ...We do need a

<sup>20</sup> Clarence Callow was the Senior Ferry Captain at that time.

<sup>21</sup> *Nanaimo Times*, October 14, 1975.

doctor on the island. We can't, shouldn't run without the doctor..."

The original idea was that the Ambulance Society would get the money and then pay Dr. Metten, and [the Government] had some sort of problem. I suspect it was an accounting problem.... And so they said well, what we'll do is we'll fund Dr. Metten on the basis that he can earn \$50,000 and for every two dollars over that we'll reduce our subsidy from the Government. Which was good for us and good for the taxpayer as well.

One of the problems (how history repeats itself) was that many Gabriolans preferred to have a family doctor on Vancouver Island or even in Vancouver, using the local doctor only for emergencies. The following year, on September 26, 1977, Gabriola Ratepayers and Residents Association wrote a letter to GVAC saying:

...it now appears that there are many residents who regard a resident doctor as someone to be called upon in an emergency; otherwise, they travel to town to another Doctor. It is fully recognised that the freedom to attend a doctor of one's choice is absolute. However, it must be realized that if we as residents cannot support a medical practice here, we will be faced with the loss of such a practice...no doctor will come here without knowing that it is possible to make a living here.

We will do everything possible to bring this matter to the notice of the islanders, and we hope that you can also do the same.

### ***Gabriola's first defibrillator***

In October 1976, Dr. Metten asked GVAC about the possibility of buying a defibrillator for the island at a possible cost of about \$5000. He would investigate the precise cost and type. The following spring Dr. Metten advised the executive to pursue the matter with the Ministry of Health and

Welfare and GVAC's letter of May 11 1977 said:

We have approached the Emergency Health Services Commission; they cannot consider supplying such an expensive piece of equipment... As many of our 1500 permanent population are elderly, and many of them suffer from heart conditions it is considered by Dr. Metten, Dr. Bennett Horner of Nanaimo, and other doctors...that we should have [a] defibrillator on Gabriola Island.

In September, GVAC received a letter from the Ministry offering to pay \$1000 toward the cost of a \$2000 portable defibrillator. The irony of that was that suitable defibrillators cost between \$3765 and \$4992. The Lion's Club offered to help, so that GVAC could buy the superior "Life-Pack #4" and they asked the Ministry to increase their share to two-thirds. GVAC would sponsor Avramenko in upgrading his qualifications to use the defibrillator. In November 1977, the following public notice was issued:

To Whom it may Concern.

This is to state that the portable Lifepak 4 Defibrillator...at the local Doctor's Clinic was purchased jointly by the Gabriola Lyons [*sic*] Club and the Gabriola Volunteer Ambulance Corps, 50/50, as a memorial to the late Dr. Leonard J. Williams who was Gabriola's first practicing physician. The defibrillator is for the benefit of the Gabriola Community and is to be operated by any practising doctor resident on Gabriola. The care and maintenance of the defibrillator to be the sole responsibility of the GVAC. The cost of any insurance necessary to be shared equally by the GLC and the GVAC.

The final cost of the defibrillator was \$5355, of which \$2670 was initially paid by the Lions Club. GVAC also received a donation toward its cost in memory of Mr. Clements for \$215 and another donation of \$28. The Government didn't increase its share, and

when their \$1000 arrived, GVAC transferred \$500 of it to the Lions Club. The Government refused to insure the defibrillator under the ambulance equipment policy, so the Lions Club also shared its insurance costs until 1980, when it became GVAC's sole responsibility.

### ***First-aid and CPR training and the Resusianne***

At this time, much of the crew's training and all the practice sessions were still supervised by Gabriola volunteers, and GVAC's Secretary and Treasurer were paid allowances of only \$25 per month, which was grossly insufficient for the level of administrative responsibility required. At the end of 1977, GVAC wrote to ask the Ministry of Health to increase their allowances to \$100 each and to reimburse people giving training sessions. In reply, the Government wrote that it based administration allowances on call volume and that Gabriola was therefore allowed only \$65 per month total for administration. In later correspondence they said that full-time paid administrative staff would be available only when there were more than 100 ambulance calls per year. However, they agreed to pay for one call-out claim per month for Mr. Hale to conduct practice sessions for the crew.

GVAC was making great efforts to ensure that the ambulance crew was properly trained. They continued to send them for training, and usually paid the costs in full or part. The drivers all had Class 4 licences, and attendants were expected to attend monthly two-hour first-aid practice sessions that were held on Sunday mornings at the Fire Hall. Apparently the crew were not always too keen on these because Mike Hale had to issue a notice to all the attendants about attending them regularly, saying, "If I

do not hear from you within a week I shall remove your name from the list. Next meeting April 30 10.30 am."

In the spring of 1978, GVAC offered congratulations to Pam Fairchild for her First-aid courses and to George Westarp for passing the Instructor's course so that he could teach the ambulance and fire crews CPR techniques. They needed a proper life-sized doll called a "Resusianne" to practise these techniques on, and the board moved to put aside \$1000 to buy a one, though it turned out to cost \$1439. George Westarp recalled:

It was really funny because ...I had asked [Bob Castell] to leave it at my place once, and we had that Dalmation, and it was sitting on the concrete porch there, ... and ...when I came home the Resusianne was teetering on the edge of the porch 'cause he was scared to go any closer to the house because of the dog... it was showing its teeth rather dramatically.

### ***Finding Gabriola addresses***

As the population grew, it got harder to keep track of where people lived. The Fire Department, Ambulance crews and police all had problem finding people's houses, particularly at night. Periodically, there were attempts to formalize addressing on the island at the RDN, but nothing came of it, but that would hardly have helped emergency crews find houses hidden up long driveways. In late 1977, a notice appeared in the *Flying Shingle* about calling for the ambulance:

After calling if at all possible and ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT hang a white sheet or tablecloth at the entrance of your driveway. This will be easily seen by the driver and will save possible delay.

Despite the on-going confusion about addresses on Gabriola, in the Fall of 1979,

after viewing an engineering firm's proposal using a grid system for a Nanaimo Regional house numbering initiative, GVAC decided that the "Nanaimo Regional House Numbering Function" probably wouldn't work on Gabriola, and declined to participate saying it "would be a total waste of tax payers' money".

Much later, at the 1988 AGM, GVAC again discussed the difficulty of finding clients' addresses. George Williamson reported then that he had discussed the issue with RCMP and would also discuss it with the fire chief. Discussion of this issue continued into the 1990s, and a decision was eventually made that emergency response would be made only to addresses that are marked.

### ***Establishing long-term homecare on Gabriola***

The BC Government decided to establish a long-term care program province-wide, effective January 1978. The Social Planning and Review Council of BC produced a pamphlet "A Citizen's Guide to Long Term Care in BC" that described the services and how to access them, and the Training Committee of the Community Home-maker Association of BC produced a pamphlet "Home-maker Job Orientation" describing a six-unit course for Home-makers. GVAC's executive decided to investigate their status regarding funding for long-term care and Kathy Hiley obtained a copy of the relevant "New Society Act".

At a July meeting with Jean Paavelienan, Myrna Halsall, and the Nanaimo Home-Makers Board, it was made clear that they wouldn't accept Gabriola as a satellite. Gabriola would have to run its own long-term homecare program, but if it was to be GVAC's responsibility, they had to set up a separate board with three GVAC Board members and three members of the general

public. The new group would have to employ a supervisor, a bookkeeper, and a team of homemakers. Shortly after this, on August 1, GVAC held an emergency General Meeting at Agi Hall to discuss changing its constitution to allow the society to offer long-term homecare. GVAC wanted their current emergency short-term homecare to be kept separate from the long-term service. Motions<sup>22</sup> to allow this were passed at another meeting two weeks later after publicity in the *Flying Shingle* and *Nanaimo Times*. Three members from the public were elected at this meeting to serve on the new board and this notice was sent to the *Shingle* on August 24:

The Gabriola Home-makers (subsidiary of GVAC) under the Long-term Care Program have as their Board of Directors the following: Mr. J. White (Tony); Miss Leona Lockhart RN, Mr. J. Kavanagh, Mrs. Joan Hopkin, Mr. R. Castell, Mrs. K. Hiley.

A Supervisor; 1 Part-time Assist. Supervisor/Coordinator; Part-time Bookkeeper; and Homemakers will be employed. At this time salaries for these positions have not been finalised by the Board but applications will be accepted on this basis.

In November 1978, the Executive decided that "the Supervisor/coordinator of the home-maker branch of GVAC should be paid \$3.50 per hour on the basis of 8 hours a month commencing now; not retroactive". The ambulance had made 98 calls that year and homemakers had provided 235 hours of short-term and 913 hours of long-term service. Five people had completed Medical Attendant courses, and four more had taken CPR courses. At the AGM, they thanked

<sup>22</sup> The required constitutional change to allow GVAC to "establish and maintain one or more BRANCH SOCIETIES with such powers not exceeding the powers of the society as the society confers" was registered as By Law 12 in September 1978.

Mike Hale and his volunteer crew for their contributions to the service and Caroline Atkinson replaced Rick Avramenko as a Director. Later that month, GVAC celebrated and rewarded its volunteers and workers with another of their reputedly fabulous Christmas parties at Surf Lodge<sup>23</sup> and on December 13, GVAC received a letter from EHSC saying their service “is now receiving nationwide recognition, and you can be proud”.

In the next couple of years, long-term and short-term care became thoroughly established on Gabriola, and the crews worked out their mutual responsibilities. At first, there was confusion over the responsibility for care when a person who had previously received long-term care was released from hospital, thus requiring short-term emergency care during recovery. It was agreed that they would receive short-term care until they could be reassessed for long-term care. Pam Fairchild attended GVAC Board meetings to report regularly on homecare activities and on May 28, 1979, the Home-makers Board appointed Leona Lockhart in charge of training; Jim Kavanagh, personnel; and Tony White, budgeting.

The homecare service was very much needed and appreciated, and GVAC got many letters of thanks. One grateful recipient wrote:

Dear Members, I just want to thank you so very much for your tremendous support which I was much in need of after my total hip replacement—and also for the use of your wheelchair which I will take good care of for a few weeks while I use it to take care of several Dr.'s apts. Your support gave me

<sup>23</sup> GVAC's Christmas Party dinner bill at Surf Lodge that year was 62 dinners @ \$6.95; 21 wine @ \$5.75; 80 Drink tickets @ 5 for \$6. TOTAL = \$647.65 + \$65 gratuity.

a real sense of security since my family live so far away. Thanks again so much.

## The end of the volunteer era

In the spring of 1979, the Ministry of Health notified unit chiefs that BC Housing Commission would be formalizing leases and rent payment, thus becoming responsible for the arrangement with the Fire Department to house and heat the ambulance. The ambulance service was running smoothly, with ambulance response forms and callout sheets sent to Victoria twice a month, and the crews' dispatch notes sent within three days, as they occurred.<sup>24</sup>

In 1979, GVAC had 343 members and by September, the volunteer crew had donated \$4182 and made 81 calls. The homecare aides had given 74 hours of homecare. Although Gabriola's year-round population was now around 2000, there were still too few ambulance call-outs to merit full-time ambulance administrative staff. With a mix of full and part-time crew, it was decided that full-time crew would not be called out in their off-duty hours unless part-time crew were unavailable. The GVAC executive elected at the September AGM were: Chair, Bob Castell; Treasurer Joan Hopkin; Secretary, Ruth Harwood; Directors, Frank Hiley, Caroline Atkinson, Svend Peterson; Director of Drivers, Mike Hale (who was asked to continue this role indefinitely); Convenor of BCEHS Trudy Hale. Svend replaced George Hague, who as one of the original Directors, was appointed Honorary Director for life. The Hileys were leaving to go on an extended holiday in Arizona, so Bob Castell invited George Westarp to stand as a new Director to replace Frank.

<sup>24</sup> That summer GVAC asked the Government how long the society's records needed to be kept, and they were told only two years—it's fortunate for historians that they ignored this directive.



Although by 1974, the ambulance service was government funded, the work of the GVAC in the volunteer years was so appreciated by islanders that donations and membership fees continued to add to the society's resources. These were, and are, used to support various health-related causes.

That year the society bought three oxygen kits, two of them (as well as a walker) paid for by donations from friends in memory of Myrtle Hague, wife of mechanic George. Captain Ketchum kindly agreed to store one of the kits on the ferry unless/until the ferry had its own installed. Donations in memory of Doris Gardiner and Rita Henry's mother were used to buy bedside commodes to be used by the Homecare service. Storage of all this equipment was often a problem—we have a 1980 list of hospital beds, commodes, bath-stools, monkey bars, and wheelchairs that were stored in a shed beside Hopkin's house, and another, longer list of equipment kept at the firehall. All of it had to be kept track of and kept in good order as it was signed in and out for loan to short- and long-term care clients.

In 1979, GVAC made \$500 donations to Variety Club of Western Canada and to the Telethon, and smaller donations to local causes like the Dave Mathiesen Retirement Fund and \$25 to "Nanaimo Association for

the Mentally Retarded". They contributed to the Gabriola community in many ways, such as paying to move the mobile home of a "severely handicapped mother of two" from Descanso Bay to the North Road property of her father-in-law. Again, GVAC's volunteer drivers shared the cost with the Lions Club, each contributing \$1500.

But by the early 1980s, economic times were changing and although many continued to volunteer willingly, some needed paid work. The Government service was again pressing for the crew to be formally paid and did not wish to continue transferring the crew's pay directly to GVAC. In conversation with Bob Castell, George Westarp said:

...the Emergency Health Services insisted on paying the crew, and their agreement was that we would vote on it and if any one voted to accept the pay, then we'd accept the pay. And at least two people I believe voted to accept the pay. And I think part of the reason was... '81-'82 was the big depression, and the result of that was that there were I think quite a few of the guys on the ambulance were starting to feel the pinch 'cause they weren't getting enough construction work.

In November 1983, Mike Hale reported that GVAC would no longer receive Ministry funds because the drivers and attendants would be paid directly in future. The question then arose whether the volunteer society should fold, or raise its fees in order to keep going with its health-related work in the community. The discussion was deferred until the January AGM since Christmas was close and a ferry strike was in process. Significantly, they decided against having their usual annual Christmas party for their volunteers, and talked of a February potluck dinner instead. Truly the end of an era.

The board issued a circular explaining that drivers and attendants were paid directly by the Government now, and adding:

We still do not have the required amount of callouts to warrant full-time staff. The Society is now in the position of having to raise the annual membership fees from \$5 to \$15. For approximately two years transport fees have been \$25. We shall provide homecare for our members for the up and coming year, but it is questionable if this service can be continued.

At the AGM in January 1984, Mike Lee replaced Mike Hale as Director of Drivers and Hale replaced Frank Hiley on GVAC's Board. Money previously donated by the volunteer drivers and attendants during 1983 had been \$2665, and another donor gave \$500. The Society had donated \$500 to the Variety Club Telethon and had continued to subsidize the homecare program with money and equipment. Members discussed how to best use their accumulated funds, but much depended on whether the increased fees would support their plans.

### ***Establishing the scholarship fund 1984/5***

The Ambulance Society decided to use some of their accumulated donations to set up a scholarship fund to support a local high school pupil wishing to study in a medically related field. In October 1984, L. Hedberg, Chairman of the Financial Assistance Society of Nanaimo District Secondary School (NDSS) wrote to GVAC expressing willingness to administer such a trust fund and explaining how it worked. Their Society maintained a term deposit of pooled principals and paid scholarships out of each fund's interest, calculated proportionately. The letter continued:

This is an area that does need support from our community. At present there are only

two scholarships for students entering a medical related field. Both of these are in the \$300 range...

\$1500, with a \$800/\$700 split over the first and second years would definitely be appropriate to one of our top graduating students.

By November, the Society's operating expenses seemed to be in decent shape, and they still had two term deposits (invested at 10%) totalling \$23,276, so Castell's board took a specific proposal to the 1984 AGM on November 27 to start a special scholarship trust fund, which read:

Gabriola Ambulance Society Scholarship Trust Fund will have a principle value of \$15,000 and will be administered at no cost by the 'NDSS Financial Assistance Society'. All monies in this fund will be help in perpetuity and will be open to private and public donations to be considered as part of the principal. The scholarship will depend on interest earnings of the principle. It will be invested in a renewable one-year term deposit. The FA Soc will review the earnings in changing financial circumstances and deal with disbursements while retaining the principal's integrity. The scholarship will have a target amount of \$1500 split over two years (\$800 plus \$700) and will be available to any graduating student in School District 68 entering advanced academic studies in medically related fields. It will be awarded on recommendation of the Scholarship Committee on proof of registration at an accredited institution. Scholarship will be awarded to an outstanding graduating student and consideration will be given to excellence in scholarship, participation, citizenship, and potential leadership.

This proposal was carried enthusiastically, and was immediately implemented for that school year. We have a photograph of founding GVAC member Ada Burkholder presenting the first Gabriola Ambulance Society Scholarship award to Justine



Ada Burkholder presenting the first Gabriola Ambulance Society Scholarship Award to Justine Stewart of Nanaimo Senior Secondary School in June 1985.

Stewart of Nanaimo Senior Secondary School the following June.

In 1987, the Society increased their Scholarship Fund to avoid drawing down the principal, and in 1989, the whole Nanaimo District School Awards program took a new format and became the "Nanaimo Secondary Schools Awards Program", joining together programs for John Barsby, Nanaimo District, Woodlands, and Wellington Secondary Schools.

By 1991, the Scholarship Fund of \$15,290 invested at 10% had become inadequate: originally the donated money had easily covered one year's tuition fee, but now it covered only 50% of University tuition or 85% of Malaspina University-College (as it

was then) fees. The Directors reviewed the situation and considered applying for charitable status so that tax receipts could be offered to donors and their donations could be funnelled straight into the scholarship fund, though this idea was rejected.

In 1992, when the scholarship fund was \$25 short, the board supplied the shortfall. This Ambulance Society scholarship continues to the present, adjusted to meet economic conditions of the times.

### *Continued donations in and out*

Despite the ambulance service being Government-funded, GVAC's work continued to be greatly appreciated by the community, and they still received substantial donations as well as membership fees. In December 1985, GVAC was notified that it was to receive 10% of Elsie Brake's estate (estimated to be worth well over \$500,000). By the end of 1986, the society had received \$30,324 in donations (including a partial payment from the Brake estate) and another \$3688 from membership fees. GVAC put their surplus money in a term deposit at 6.25% and used the interest to donate to worthy causes, giving \$1000 in 1985 to the Firefighters' Burn Unit, and \$500 the following year to the Provincial Ambulance Service Public Relations and Education Society. They continued to enhance health care on Gabriola with purchases such as a new stretcher for Gabriola Medical Clinic.

Discussions about GVAC's outgoing donations included furnishing rooms and alert systems at the Kiwanis Lodge, buying portable units for the disabled elderly, and supporting a society that restores old ambulances. They stayed focussed on health-related causes. They continued to receive donations of equipment and money (small and large) and by the end of 1987

they had \$55,930 in term deposits. Bob Castell was asked to approach the intensive care department of the Nanaimo hospital to see what their needs were, and in 1988, after final settlement of the Brake estate, GVAC donated two pulse generators (\$5000) in memory of Dan, Elsie and Joe Brake. They also donated another \$500 to the burn unit.

At the 1990 AGM, the Society also decided to donate \$12,000 to the hospital in memory of Jimmy Rollo and Bill Rowan. The money was intended for a pulse oximeter and a cardiac monitor, but the needs of the hospital had changed and they requested to use it for a stretcher and a blood-pressure monitor instead.

The defibrillator used by Dr. Metten had been replaced by the Lions Club and at first it was hoped that the old one could be refurbished and used by the ambulance service, but it was beyond repair. The board discussed buying a new Automatic External Defibrillator to be installed in the ambulance for the exclusive use of Gabriolans and had requested that the BC Ambulance Service take responsibility for training and maintenance, but because of the change in Government all such applications were on hold in 1991. Finally in the spring of 1992, GVAC received a letter from BCAS saying that any donated defibrillator must be a particular make and model, and on June 10, the Unit Chief asked that \$7612 be sent to BCAS in Victoria, who would buy the defibrillator for GVAC.

### ***Mid-eighties staffing difficulties***

Throughout the 1980s, there were difficulties getting enough qualified staff to crew the ambulance, particularly during the day. In 1986, six drivers and attendants had to handle two 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, with two on duty at each shift. More were needed and a vigorous PR campaign was

recommended. In January 1986, Betty Wilson, Secretary of Gabriola Ratepayers and Residents Association wrote a letter to Emergency Health Services Commission saying they were

...concerned about the critical situation facing [Gabriola Ambulance Society] and asking for special consideration by allowing a full-time attendant on Gabriola... If you have a better solution please let us know.

The letter cites:

...substantial loss in personnel and... [an] economic situation which causes young people to leave Gabriola and search for work elsewhere, and because our small population is largely made up of retired people.

By the end of 1987, they had 12 staff; five worked days and the rest weekends and nights.

During this period, discussions were also going on between the Government and Gabriola Fire Protection District (under the chairmanship of H. David Hobbs), and they consulted with GVAC about issues such as use of qualified personnel; paying for calls; reimbursement of training costs; age limits; jeopardization of other employment; penalization for refusal to take a call, and the costs of administration matters such as filing T4 slips. It was felt that a public forum would be desirable before the two societies had a joint board discussion.

By the end of 1987, several of GVAC's long-time board members wished to step down, including Bob Castell, who had health problems. Svend Pederson became Chairman of the Board, and Bruce Thomas the Secretary/Treasurer; Mike Lee, Mike Hale, and George Williamson were elected board members. George Williamson was the Director of Drivers, and the executive hired Betty Castell as the bookkeeper, to receive an honorarium of \$100 per month. A presentation was made to Bob Castell for

his many years of service to the Society, and he continued to interest himself in its affairs well after his official role was finished.<sup>25</sup>

At the 1987 AGM, the members had discussed again the possibility and desirability of splitting GVAC and the Home Support Society into separate entities and eventually Victoria agreed to the split. Relations remained good between the two societies, and GVAC continued to donate equipment for use by homecare clients. A letter early in 1990 from Gabriola Home Support Society said how useful the equipment loan service had been for their clients and requested two up-to-date lightweight wheelchairs, which GVAC provided.

The issue of who should pay for training continued to irritate. Unit Chief Williamson wrote to the board requesting payment for a course for five crewmembers. At the November meeting, Bob Castell recommended that a percentage of these courses be paid by GVAC because the Government refused to pay for courses that they did not "recognise". The board authorized the \$500 payment and also \$250 for a reference library for the crew. The Government agreed the following February to pay for Industrial First-aid courses.

Locals continued to donate generously. In January 1990, GVAC received a letter from Gabriola Senior Citizens Association stating their wish to donate \$300 to GVAC "to enable a volunteer to take an industrial First-aid course in 1990 as we did in 1989." The Gabriola Seniors continued to support First-aid training in this way. That March, a letter stated that Government policy on training

bursaries was to pay half on completion of training and the rest after they have served on the crew for 90 days.

Another continuing discussion was what would happen to the ambulance service if ferry service was disrupted. In 1989, the board discussed what would happen during a projected three-day ferry disruption. The President said he would discuss ambulance arrangements with the Captain and the board was told that Airvac would be used in daylight, but it was not clear what would happen at night.

### ***A new executive and the shifting role of the Ambulance Society***

Frustrations were building about the on-going problems of recruiting, training, and scheduling the ambulance crew. What was the appropriate role of the Society, which no longer funded a voluntary ambulance service? Before leaving the board, Bruce Thomas voiced many of the concerns felt since the Government had taken over the service:

If we do not have sufficient callouts to support fulltime staff why does the Government insist on paying drivers and attendants directly? What exactly is the position of the Society at this point? If any of the volunteers on this island decide to quit their services, which residents rely on, who recruits more volunteers—the Society? or the Government? or the appointed unit chief who is also a volunteer? What is the Society going to do with accumulated funds of 14 years? If the Society disbanded who would the people of Gabriola Island depend on for any injury or sickness?

In 1990, there was again discussion of the confusion due to the society's official name *Gabriola Island Volunteer Ambulance Corps* since it no longer had volunteer attendants, and it also served the community in a variety of other ways. There was a

<sup>25</sup> Svend Pedersen recently told George Westarp that the "special presentation" made to Bob Castell when he retired included an honorary life membership in the Society.



The opening of Gabriola Ambulance Station 153, officiated by Unit Chief George Williamson, was held July 31 1993 and the ribbon was cut by MLA Dale Lovick and original member of the Volunteer Ambulance Corps Cath Hiley. At the station opening, the ambulance society donated a new Medic 610 AED.

In the photo, left to right, are Dean Monterey (Superintendent, Region 1 Central), Cath Hiley, Dale Lovick, George Williamson, and paramedics Joe Persin, Tawny Capon, Bill Hunn, Barb Dickinson, and Shawn Hanna.

request to change the name by special resolution to “Gabriola Emergency Health and Care Society” at the next AGM, but this didn’t occur.<sup>26</sup>

Other significant changes were in the works at this time on Gabriola. In March 1992, at an ambulance society executive meeting, Marolin Dahl of the Home-makers’ Society reported that the Islands Trust had set up a committee to look into the feasibility of having a clinic on Gabriola, and to consider related issues such as health and homecare. It was decided that Bruce McIntyre would represent GVAC on the Community Health Committee. George Westarp was now Chairman of the GVAC Board, Nicki

<sup>26</sup> GVAC’s name was eventually changed to GAS on April 11, 1995, and its constitution updated.

Westarp was Secretary/Treasurer, and Charlotte Jacobson and George Williamson were elected Directors. In his 1992 President’s Report at the AGM, George Westarp said:

The close link between the ambulance service on the island and the Society [GVAC] was loosened when the Government insisted on paying the attendants directly. Since that time, the Society has operated on membership dues and has funded projects from the accumulated surplus and bequests, which provide the capital base for a steady income.

On May 6, 1992, GVAC wrote a letter to Elizabeth Cull minister of Health about extending the Provincial Health Ministry’s Home Nursing Programme to include Gabriola residents. It noted that 244 patients from Gabriola were admitted to NRGH that year, requiring 1152 bed-days of care. It claimed that 40 of these could have been given home nursing care, saving 190 bed days in hospital. The letter noted that a second doctor was now serving Gabriolans; that there were plans for a Medical Centre; and that palliative care was needed on the island. It attached a letter of support dated May 8 from “Gabriola Medical Committee” signed by Rick Mitchell.

In August 1993, there was an Extraordinary General Meeting of GVAC to discuss the

proposed new Health Care Centre on Gabriola and GVAC's possible involvement. None of the GVAC directors were able or willing to be on the new board, but they supported the idea of a health centre and wished to be kept informed and to receive the minutes of the new society's meetings. They did not wish to donate money for land or buildings, or for operating costs of a clinic, but would willingly donate toward the cost of a clinic's equipment.

### ***A new ambulance building—1993***

In 1987, Joyce White's newspaper article had reported that the ambulance was still housed at #1 Fire Hall, "where attendants go and radio contact is made with the health service and ferry". She also wrote:

Our present ambulance now carries a full range of equipment. Bandages and dressings for major and minor wounds. Light metal splints that automatically apply tractions. A full line of stretchers, including portable ones that can be carried into the woods. Back boards to immobilize patients with back injuries. Oxygen equipment. And maternity kits.

Relations between the ambulance and fire services had always been close and the ambulance was housed for many years at the fire station, but the ambulance had recurring problems with inadequate or inconvenient equipment storage. They needed their own ambulance station, and in 1990, the Society was told that it would receive an ambulance station "in a year or so". During board discussions of the need for a dedicated ambulance station with storage, it was decided to approach the firehall trustees about cooperating. Pederson reported back that "they had no interest in having anything to do with GAS [GVAC] or the ambulance station".

In the late 1980s, there had been problems with the firehall keys, and GVAC decided to move their equipment to storage at Agi Hall and the Executive approved funding for storage walls and labels. At the December 1990 AGM, it was announced that there would be no new ambulance station at this time due to budget cuts. This was serious because the ambulance was scheduled to move out of the firehall by July 31, 1991.

The Firehall offered to build a new station in return for a long lease, but at the 1991 AGM in December, the Ambulance Chief reported that another ambulance car (used) was to be provided by the BC Government, and that in 1992 the Government would build an ambulance station with room for two ambulances on Don Powell's land adjacent to Church Street, to be available to Gabriola's ambulance service on a long-term lease. The plans were finally on the drawing board.

The new building was completed early in 1993 and had its grand opening in July. A mobile lab for blood tests was planned to be at the ambulance station weekly by the following year. In the spring of 1994, permission was granted to store the society's miscellaneous health-related equipment at the ambulance station, thus saving over \$4000 in rent. The only conditions were that GVAC would provide the needed shelving and an ambulance attendant should be on its Board of Directors. Finally, Gabriola had achieved a professionally staffed ambulance service housed in a dedicated building with Government financing. The days of volunteer "black angels" arriving to ferry patients to the hospital in a dilapidated hearse were thoroughly over. ♦