



LADYMINTOAPW0610 BLACK ONE...

Like much of Canada, my island, Salt Spring, still has little wisps and vestiges of British regalia pinned to its topographical lapel. There's the town of Ganges named after a British Navy flagship; half of our mountains -- Bruce, Hope, Erskine -- and many of our bays (Fulford, Burgoyne) carry the names of British naval officers.

And then there's Lady Minto. No naval officer she, but an upstanding doyenne of British aristocracy. Her name was Mary Caroline Grey, she was wife of a Governor General of Canada back in the early 1900's. And she was by all accounts a right and proper lady and a generous philanthropist in her own right.

I think Lady Minto would be proud of the doughty little hospital that perches on a hill near Ganges and bears her name today. It's a robust and reliable medical redoubt staffed by friendly and astonishingly competent people who strive to make a visit to the hospital as good as good as a visit to the hospital can get.

And there's also a fabulous Lady Minto Surgical Operating facility in that hospital -- available to the 15 thousand plus British Columbians who live in the southern Gulf Islands year round -- not to mention the tens of thousands of tourists who vacation here each year.

Oh wait -- scratch that last entry. The Health Authority has decided that we don't need the Lady Minto surgery after all. This, after public assurances that the surgery would be continued in 2006 -- only four short years ago. Oh. And also after a three million dollar upgrade -- courtesy of the Vancouver Island Health Authority -- just five short years ago.

Why the VIHA about face? Well, it's complicated, as all these health questions are. But what it comes down to, from VIHA's point of view is...they just can't find surgical personnel to staff it.

Which is curious to me. Because I know at least one surgeon in Mississauga who would give up his first born and/or his BMW for a chance to practice surgery on

Salt Spring. An orthopaedic surgeon I met at a convention in Arizona asked me ‘Who do I have to kill to hang out my shingle on your island?’ He wasn’t smiling.

Turns out the problem isn’t so much that VIHA can’t find surgeons for the Lady Minto surgical facility presently gathering dust. It’s more that they...*haven’t actually advertised* for any. They’ve been leaning towards shutting it down for years, but lack the administrative cojones to up and say so. So it’s the death of a thousand cuts. As a matter of fact the last surgeon the hospital had would still be in the Lady Minto OR sawing away, if he hadn’t, he says, been forced to retire in 2008.

Dr Roy Preshaw says he came to the island after he was told that Lady Minto would be the anchor for health care for the population of all the southern Gulf Islands.

That’s what brought him to practice on the island in 2002 and kept him plenty busy til his retirement two years ago.

So what’s to happen with the brand new and suddenly next to useless Lady Minto operating facility? It might still be used for minor operations like endoscopies, even though they really don’t require a multi-million dollar theatre. Presumably VIHA has some plan to justify the closure. Just as they presumably have some plan to give back the 800 thousand dollars that Salt Springers pledged to keep the surgery alive.

Be nice if this impasse could – unlike most BC political hot potatoes – be resolved amicably and a facility that was built to serve the afflicted could actually go ahead and do that instead of being cordoned off and mothballed.

That would be – as Lady Minto would no doubt tell us were she here – the right and proper thing to do.

I’m arthur black on planet salt spring.

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NOTE: Copied from an email to Ray Phillips from Arthur Black, June 28, 2010.