



# *Whonnock Notes*

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## **Short Writings on Local History**

by Fred Braches

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Occasional papers of the Whonnock Community Association to promote the research and understanding of the past of our community.

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As a contributor to the “Looking Back” column of *Maple Ridge News* I have a wonderful opportunity sharing my discoveries in local history with many readers.

In this issue of *Whonnock Notes* are my writings about Whonnock and Ruskin published in *The News* from 1999 to 2012 as well as three other pieces that I originally published years ago as pamphlets.

*Fred Braches*

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# MARY WEST: A MOVER AND SHAKER

*Maple Ridge News*, 10 February 1999

Starting in the late 1800s, after the railroad opened the area for settlement, Norwegian families found their way to Whonnock. First the Andersons and some Nelsons, followed by the Lees and later the Knudsons.

Martha Marie Lee married Ole Nelson in Norway. In 1891, she and her husband and baby son came to Whonnock, where Ole Nelson's brother lived. Two of her own brothers were in BC already and her other four brothers and two sisters and parents came from Norway the next year and settled in Whonnock.

In 1895 the Norwegians established a Lutheran congregation—perhaps the first one in BC—and a couple of years later the women formed the Lutheran Women's Association.

Martha Mary – by then the mother of two sons – was a driving force and became the association's first president. Her first stay in Whonnock and her active participation in the association ended in 1902, when her husband Ole Nelson, died in New Westminster in April of that year.

The young widow remarried later in 1902 year with George West, a son of Henry West, a well-known builder of paddle wheelers, and Louisa Fallerdeau. Since 1898, Yukon gold had lured the Lee sons north and two of them decided to stay in Alaska.

The Wests, with Mary's young sons Aksel and Hoken Nelson went to Nome, Alaska, where Mary worked as a cook for her brothers and assisted the doctor in the local hospital. Her third son, Henry West, was born there in 1904.

In their absence the Norwegians congregation had acquired a cemetery and built their own Lutheran church, but when the West's returned to live in Whonnock in 1910, Mary did not rejoin the Lutheran Women's Association.

Her energy went towards a movement, spearheaded by Mrs. Spilsbury, to establish a Ladies Club and construct a community hall in Whonnock. Mary was obviously a key figure in the formative year of the Ladies Club. Almost all meetings of the ladies took place at Mrs. West's.

Her competence is shown by the tasks entrusted to her. For example Mrs. West interviewed "the men of Stave Falls" for contributions and went to town "to interview a lawyer re: incorporation." It was Mary who approached "the different hardware stores" for estimates. She discussed the wiring of the new hall including the connection for "moving pictures." She must have been very much involved with the construction of the hall, where her brother, Olaus, was the carpenter.

Those were banner years for Whonnock, and Mary was right in the centre of it. The hall was constructed on land, purchased from her and she got "a standing vote of thanks ... for her donation of the extra land given." The ladies Club "adjourned to Lutheran Church in order to inspect a beautiful drop scene" for the stage at the hall, "painted by Mrs. West and donated by her to the club."

Mary and her sister Georgina Fletcher, who gave many years of tireless and faithful support to both associations, arranged a dance to celebrate that year's independence of Norway from Sweden. The Lutheran pastor prodded the members of the Norwegian Women's Association to ask Mary to do an altar painting for their church. It was not to be a donation. In the end, when no agreement on the amount could be reached, Mary simply removed the painting from its frame and returned the money paid for it.

Mary resigned in 1913 from the Ladies Club when some insulting remarks were made in a meeting and she did not want to reconsider her decision.

We know nothing yet about her life in Whonnock after that. We are not even certain when the West's moved away from Whonnock. The impression one gets is that the life of this practical and strong willed pioneer woman was not free of conflict.

On the other hand, her willingness and ability to do things and move others into action were key factors for the creation of an organization or the construction of the community hall—a continuing feature of Whonnock.

Those who knew her in later life remember Mary, a member of the Norwegian Lees of Whonnock, as a caring, determined and loyal woman who moved in and skillfully took care where needed.



Four generations: Great-grandfather Ole Andreas Lee Sr. with his daughter Mary (then Mrs. West), her son Axel Nelson and his infant son Melvin, born in 1911. Photo courtesy Linda Mattis.

# WHY WAS ST. PAUL'S BUILT SO FAR FROM THE RIVER?

*Maple Ridge News*, 3 October 2001

In 2001 the Anglican Parish of Whonnock celebrated its 110-year anniversary. In 1891 they built a church on 272nd Street, then called North Road or Whonnock Road, about a mile inland from the settlement on the river. They called their church St. Paul's.

For many years the only church building in Whonnock and the Stave River area had been the Roman Catholic Church on the Whonnock Reserve. Anglican and other clergymen preached at the little schoolhouse in Whonnock, which was close to the shop and the post office, and also near to the rail station and the wharf where the steamers called daily.

Why then did the Church of England people choose to build their first church at such a distance from the river? One of the reasons must have been that there were no parishioners living in the old settlement. Most of the land on the riverside was at that time owned by the Presbyterian Reverend Alexander Dunn. In 1891 there were only a handful of homes there. Only the Reverend Dunn, the shopkeeper George A. Smith, Robert Robertson, and Clement Stickney had houses there. None of them were Anglicans. Almost all Church of England people lived on spread-out farms either to the north of St Paul's in "North Whonnock" or in the Stave area, as far away as the Rolleys at Rolley Lake, and beyond. For others, such as the Sampsons, the Olivers, and later the Percys, the new church was relatively close to their homes. The location of the church may have meant a few extra steps for Ashton and Benjamin Spilsbury, but they would have arrived on horseback anyway. Obviously the parishioners did not think that the site of their church was in any way inconvenient or "out of the way."

## *The Whonnock Store*

Since 1885 Noble Oliver had been the first shopkeeper and postmaster in Whonnock. He owned acreage a mile inland and for a few years he divided his time between his farm and the business of shop-keeping and handling the mail. Soon he decided to move to his farm and to get rid of the shop.

Apparently the Reverend Alexander Dunn was the next owner of the store, leasing it to George A. Smith. Noble Oliver remained officially the postmaster, but not for long. The trouble surrounding the transfer of the position of postmaster may also have played a role in the choice of St. Paul's location away from the river and is a story worth telling.

## *Petition to remove the Postmaster*

Early November in 1889, a petition by the people of the area was addressed to the Post Master General in Ottawa. It read: "Mr. Noble Oliver, Postmaster, Whonnock BC, having removed with his family from the Post Office premises to his farm, a mile or more distant and no longer taking any active part in the duties of the Post Office, we the undersigned beg to suggest that Mr. George Alexander Smith, Store keeper, who has been acting as assistant Postmaster for the last three or four months, be appointed Postmaster of Whonnock."



The Whonnock general store and post office built by Noble Oliver ca, 1885.

The Post Office Inspector in Victoria noted in his letter to Ottawa that he had written to Noble Oliver informing him that his resignation was expected. Oliver delayed his response because he wanted to find out who from the neighbourhood had signed the petition. He called it “a very underhanded way [by Dunn and Smith] to try to get a post office.” There were no signatures of Church of England people on the petition, with one glaring exception: Mr. Sampson, Justice of the Peace, a person of authority who had hosted the Anglican Bishop Sillitoe in his house that same summer of 1889.

#### *Confrontation and Removal of the Postmaster*

Early in January 1890 at the close of the Divine Service at the Whonnock School, the Anglican Reverend Ditcham and Noble Oliver cornered Mr. Sampson. Ditcham asked if Sampson had indeed signed the petition and Oliver wanted to know how Sampson could have done this to a fellow parishioner.

The Reverend Dunn reported, “Mr. Sampson said that it was not a matter about churches, but a matter of public opinion-the people in the neighbourhood wished the post office to be at the store and Mr. Smith to keep it. Mr. Sampson, by the way, reminded Mr. Ditcham that as he was not a resident of Whonnock, he should not interfere or have anything to say on the subject.”

The heated discussion became public knowledge. Service or the lack of it became the issue. As Dunn wrote: “Country people as a general rule are slow to complain-will bear a great deal before making trouble-but once roused and put on their defense they will act as others do. They all would like that the thing be arranged quietly, without more to do.” The Reverend Dunn also wrote that “rather than that Mr. Oliver should be postmaster and distribute mail at his house [the people would have their mail come to Langley and pay old Robbie Robertson a dollar a week to bring it up.”

Shopkeeper George A. Smith was nominated postmaster on 1 May 1890.

### *Campaign for an Anglican Church*

In 1891 George and William Walden started campaigning for a church building. Their sister in England, as Arthur Watson told Daphne Sleight in 1973, put up the money to build St. Paul's. A contract price of \$800 is mentioned. Noble Oliver, who owned 270 acres on both sides of 272nd Street at that time, donated an acre of land for the church. The offer of free land was probably by itself a good reason why St. Paul's was built there and not closer to the river.

It must have been with mixed feelings, but certainly also with pride that in the following year Mr. Oliver saw the new church going up on the land he donated.

He may have envisioned this land away from the store, the contentious post office, and Reverend Dunn's land as a new community core. Perhaps in time there would be a new store and even a post office close to St. Paul's. But that did not happen.

### *Move to the "Front"*

Thirty years later the congregation moved closer to the river, stores, the post office, and the station. The acreage once owned by the Reverend Dunn was now populated by many new residents and the Church of England people there wanted the church closer by. In 1921 a new house of worship, St. John the Evangelist, took St. Paul's place.

Miraculously the building of St. Paul's has survived to the present day as a private home. You can see it on your right, when you drive up 272nd Street on your way to Whonnock Lake.



St. Paul's, the first Anglican Church in Whonnock was built ca. 1891 on Whonnock Road, now 272nd Street



# WHONNOCK'S AUNT HILL

*Maple Ridge News* 7 August 2007

*As I'm writing this, an extended family is preparing for a reunion at Whonnock Lake Centre. I would like to share here some of what I have been able to find out about the past Whonnock ties of this family.*

Margaret Gouinlock, generally known as Granny Benson, the widow of Sheriff Benson of Regina, moved to Whonnock with Margaret, one of her three daughters, and with her youngest son, Arthur. They settled in a house halfway up Byrnes Road. Making fun of herself as an "old crow" in her black widow's dress, she named the house the "Crow's Nest."

No one knows why she decided to move to Whonnock. Family lore tells that her two older sons, Gouin and Barney, found Whonnock on a walking tour and the records show that in 1907 Granny Benson and Gouin owned land in Whonnock.

In 1908 another newcomer to Whonnock, Richard Sidney Whiting, who would soon be part of the family, became owner of the general store and was appointed postmaster. The store burned down in 1916 and was never rebuilt—Sidney did not get much pleasure from running a store, but he immediately opened a small post office at its present site and continued serving the community as postmaster for more than 40 years.

Did Sidney and Granny Benson's daughter Margaret ("Tot" to the family) know each other before moving to Whonnock? It seems more likely that they met regularly at the old store, when Margaret bought groceries and picked up the mail. The two were married in 1910, and their children would grow up in Whonnock.

Arthur stayed with Granny Benson for a few years longer, doing odd jobs and farm work until war broke out in 1914, and he joined the army. After the war, Arthur was stationed for some time in India before returning to Whonnock. Waiting for him there was Lorna Pavey, a former governess of the daughter of his oldest sister Frances McDonald.

Upon the outbreak of the war in 1914 Lorna had hurried home to be with her family in England. She travelled on the ill-fated *Lusitania*, which was sunk by a German submarine. About 260 people lost their lives in the disaster. An eyewitness tells she was in the dining room eating a grapefruit when the torpedo struck. As the story is told by her relatives, when the ship went down, she was sucked into one of the funnels but had the good luck to be expelled with a rush of water. She was later picked up by a passing ship. Our Whonnock old-timers often confused the *Lusitania* with the *Titanic* and added to the story that also Lorna's dog, Lobo, was saved from the disaster.

Granny Benson bought Arthur a farm on Crescent Island, and there Lorna and Arthur settled. Their surviving son Christopher (Kit) tells that the children were ferried to and from shore with a small boat to attend classes at the Whonnock school. Lorna, as an old-timer tells it, "livened up PTA meetings."

In the 1930s the two other of Granny Benson's daughters, Frances and Winifred, also came to stay in Whonnock.

Margaret Gouinlock (Granny Benson) with her children William "Gouin" is sitting on the ground. Others from left to right: Frances "Frank", James "Barney", Winnifred, Granny Benson (holding a letter from Arthur, who is serving overseas) and Margaret "Tot." (Kelowna, Summer 1919?).



The Crow's Nest burned down in an electric storm, but a new house, also called Crow's Nest, was built by Dick Whiting, the oldest son of Margaret and Sidney, as contractor. Frances, who was a professionally trained nurse, lived there with her mother and probably took care of her in her last years. Granny Benson died in 1937 at the age of 98, a wonderful woman, loved by her family and all Whonnockians. A few years later Frances would nurse Margaret Whiting until she died in 1943. Also this Margaret was remembered as a delightful person and a good friend by those who knew her.

In the 1930s Winifred Gordon moved to Whonnock, where she lived in a log cabin on Byrnes Road. A family member recalls that in the cabin, in front of a large fireplace, there was a real bear skin, which was actually worn when the whole family played charades.

The two neighbouring Byrnes homes, west of the post office, were constructed for Winnifred as speculative rental houses in 1931 and 1932 by contractors Ralph Daniels and Dick Whiting. These buildings are now part of Whonnock's heritage.

In the 1930s three Benson sisters lived on the slope behind the post office: Frances MacDonald in the Crow's Nest, a little further up Winnifred Gordon in the log cabin, and further yet was the house of the third sister, Margaret Whiting. It is at this time that the slope behind the post office became known as the "Aunt Hill."

It seems ironic that Granny Benson's two sons, Gouin and Barney, who are said to have discovered Whonnock for her, never lived there. Gouin soon sold the land he owned in Whonnock, in part to his sister Margaret.

Those of the family who lived in Whonnock for any time took an active part in its social life and contributed in no small way to the community's wellbeing.

# DEATH OF A CENTENARIAN

*Maple Ridge News* 15 August 2007



The Armes house in the 1910s with the monkey puzzle tree (circled) in the centre of the front yard.

Some day last fall, driving down 272<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, I missed the familiar outline of the Armes House behind the tall monkey puzzle tree. The old wooden home that had stood there for more than a century had disappeared. It had been torn down by new owners. It wasn't really a surprise this would happen one day because the house had not been lived in for decades and seemed beyond repair. The previous owners had already lived in a new house built on the site but had let the relic linger on. They loved the old house, but restoration and upkeep of an aged wooden structure is beyond the means of most. So, now the old Armes house is no more.

In 1998 Donald Luxton and Associates included the Armes house in an inventory of the "most significant heritage resources within the boundaries of the District of Maple Ridge." The home, lacking architectural merits, was probably included because it was associated with local area history or just because there are so few buildings of this age left in Maple Ridge.

The house was built on land originally owned by Noble Oliver, Whonnock's first shopkeeper and postmaster, and his wife Catherine. In 1908 they sold 96 acres of their land to Ole Lee, son of the Norwegian patriarch. Only a couple of years later James Armes became owner of that land. It remains a mystery who built the house and when, but Luxton thought that there was a house on the property by the turn of the century—when the land would still have been owned by the Olivers—and that the original house had either been rebuilt or substantially enlarged by the time Armes left in 1919. It survived very much unchanged after that.

The history of a home is very much the story of the people who lived there. Often not more than a name is left, but in this case I was fortunate to find out more about the family behind the name.

I learned from Roderick Martin of the Tavistock and District History Society in England that James Langman Armes came from Tavistock in South Devon, where he and his brother Frederick George operated a wholesale grocery and mineral water business under the name of Armes Brothers. Unfortunately they did not trade very long, as their premises burned down in 1893, and they were bought out by the local brewery three years later. James, who became an agricultural salesman, left for Canada in 1906.

James and his wife Florence first came to Calgary, where James opened a butcher shop supplying meat to the CPR. (I know this from Frank, their youngest son, who still lived in Williams Lake in 1997.) A little later the family moved to Vancouver, where James went into the real estate business. Frank, who was born in Vancouver, remembered how he took a day-long ride from Vancouver to Whonnock “with my Dad and Mother and a team of ponies.” “Imagine,” he said, “when you came to Pitt River, you had to take the ferry; the bridge was not yet there.”

At that time the monkey puzzle, now a huge tree, was just a small shrub. “When I was a little boy I used to jump over it,” Frank told me. Frank and his mother used to go to New Westminster on the *Skeena* or the fast boat called *Fort Langley* to the market there, “where we bought all the groceries and what was necessary.” That must have been after Whonnock’s general store had burned down in 1916.

There were anxious days: “One day I got appendicitis and it turned into peritonitis. Dr. Morse of Haney was the only doctor. You did not go to him, he came to you. When he got to the house, I was rushed immediately to Vancouver. They flagged down a freight train at Whonnock Station and I went into Vancouver.” Frank stayed in hospital for a month.

A local census taken about that time includes the name of James Armes and lists: a wife, three sons (Harold, Harvey and Frank), and one daughter (Kitty or Katherine), two horses, a milk cow, and thirty chickens.

James Armes kept an address in Vancouver, and, in addition to farming, he may have continued with some real estate work. He also had a saw mill on Silver Creek on the Mission side of Stave River, and a brick factory in Whonnock, “on the Vancouver side of the Reserve.” The brick mill took a lot of wood to keep it going. “Dad had horses and he had to take loads and loads of cordwood in to keep the fires going. My job was—I was not more than ten at the time—to lead the teams down to Haney to be shod by Duncan Graham.”

For the Armes family life in Whonnock came to an end with the death of Frances Armes in February 1919. After James buried his wife in Vancouver he took his children to a big ranch he had bought in the Williams Lake area. They left behind the house that would carry their name into the next century.

# THE LITTLE CEMETERY ON THE HILLSIDE

*Maple Ridge News* 26 March 2008

A small, ivy-covered pioneer cemetery borders a well-kept lawn in an ordinary garden in Whonnock. Access is through private property, and the wooden crosses that once marked the graves are long gone. The existence of the little graveyard, invisible, on top of a steep slope where Byrnes Road crosses Cooks Creek, is not even known to most of the neighbours.

An 1889 sketch shows a right-of-way leading straight up to the little graveyard from the home of Robert Robertson on River Road. For many years family members would have had to climb that steep path to visit the graves of their loved ones or to put to rest another from along their midst. From the cemetery there was a commanding view of the river, Crescent Island, and behind, the valley and majestic Mount Baker.

Robert Robertson was a Shetlander by birth; in 1852, as a 21-year-old lad, he was employed by the Hudson's Bay Company and for five years he served in the Northern Department of the Company. Shortly after his contract ended he settled close to the village of the Whonnock tribe on the shore of the Fraser with Tselatsetenate, his Sto:lo wife from the Nicomen area. Robert was a skilful carpenter, and he earned a living by rowing people and freight up and down and across the river. His service as "boatman" for the Rev. Alexander Dunn is particularly well documented.

Robert and Tselatsetenate had many children. Surviving in 1881 were three sons and five daughters. We know that in 1870s two daughters named Celestine and Mary died, but infant mortality was high and the little cemetery was probably established in the early 1860s. In the spring of 1884 William Robert Robertson, a 22-year old son, was hanged in New Westminster for a murder he witnessed but possibly did not commit. Old-timers thought that he lies buried in the family cemetery too. A couple of years later Robert's wife died of tuberculosis; so did their son Andrew in 1888 and their daughter Andrina in 1896. Grandchildren were laid to rest here as well. We know of little five-year old Jennie Elizabeth and Pearl, an infant, who both died in 1900. William Henry Garner, a son-in-law killed in a brawl in the Nicomen

area, was buried here in 1910. He left his wife Barbara Christine destitute. . She cleaned houses to earn a meagre living, taking care of her own and her late sister Andrina's children as well as her ageing father. Robert Robertson died in 1912, about 80 years of age. He was the last known to be buried in the little cemetery. Ten years later all Robertson's descendants had left Whonnock.

As from 1884, when Robert Robertson received a Crown Grant for the core of present-day Whonnock on the river, the family's cemetery was marked in the records of the Land Titles Office. A sketch map of 1916, tracing the route of present day Byrnes Road, still shows the property as a "private cemetery." Today's Land Title records and Municipal records don't show this property as a cemetery any more, and I am concerned that future generations will not remember or respect the peace of these pioneers any longer. To protect the graves from sale and development in years to come all the Municipality needs to do is write a letter to Land Titles confirming that Lot SK21/277 is a cemetery and arrange the return of the annotation "cemetery" to the records of this small piece of land. That does not seem easy; I've asked for this for the last ten years explaining that this is not a matter of "heritage" or "heritage conservation" but of common decency. It seems that my requests are resting peacefully.

# THE MILLER HOMES

Maple Ridge News 10 March 2010

Published with the title:  
“Preserving the Historic  
Miller Home.”

Recently the Municipality identified the “Miller Residence” at 28594-104<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Ruskin as “a site containing significant heritage value for the community.” The property owner and the municipality agreed on a “Heritage Revitalization Agreement.” A Municipal Heritage Designation will protect the heritage character of the property “in perpetuity.”

The Miller Residence was once home to the well-known Ruskin resident and author Charles A. Miller and his family. He built the house in 1932, and daughter Charmaine recalls that the family moved in before the interior was even finished. Much of the charm and convenience of the house is attributed to Mrs. Miller. “It was a good house to grow up in,” and it is still a wonderful home for those fortunate enough to live there. It is well worth responsible restoration and protection, and Council and Municipal staff should be congratulated on their recognition of our rapidly dwindling stock of built heritage.

The 1932 Miller Residence stands on land bought in 1903 by Charles’s parents, Albert George Miller and Elizabeth Taylor. One or the other of the Millers would live on that land until 1968. The present property is just a fragment of the 130 acres originally bought by the Millers from the Harris brothers, who were eager to go to South Africa. The land bought by Albert and his wife was part of a quarter section of 160 acres, originally owned by Moses Ball and sold to the Harris brothers in 1898. Most of the 130 acres the Millers owned became part of the Twin Maples Correctional Centre.

In *Valley of the Stave* (1981) Charles Miller describes the time when in November 1903 his parents arrived at Whonnock station and only a few days later bought the land in Ruskin. Since Charles was born in 1902, his “eyewitness account” of the events of November 1903 must be based on later memories and the stories told by his parents. “It was a good tract of land,” he writes, “with some thirty-five acres cleared and in cultivation.” He goes on to describe the buildings on the land, including a “chinamen’s shack,” used to house Chinese labourers “hired by the original pre-emptor, Moses Ball, to clear the land,” and a “good-sized, rough-lumber barn” to house cattle, horses and feed hay.

The Millers also found there “... a well-appointed six-room plastered frame house with a full-length veranda facing west.” This is the house identified by Charles as the Millers’ “first” home, and here he spent his first years. It was also where his four sisters (“big healthy girls”) were born. The house was probably built by Moses Ball, and for that reason Donald Luxton calls it the “Ball Residence” in *The Heritage Resources of Maple Ridge*. Luxton puts its construction as “1893 or earlier” when Ball started farming there. The title page of *Valley of the Stave* shows a photograph of the house.

The Ball Residence, at the same address as the Miller Residence, is still occupied today. It is close to the road and out of sight, hidden by an evergreen hedge. Although modifications over the years may have diminished most of its heritage character and little of the original house may remain, the number of buildings of that age in Maple Ridge



Charles A. Miller thought that the Ball Residence, the first home of the Millers in Ruskin (1903–1911), was “of like style” as the Kusha home shown on this drawing Francis Sleight made in 1972.

can be counted on one hand, and for that reason alone the history of this house should not be ignored. It is wonderful that the 1932 Miller Residence gets the attention it deserves, but there is still what is left of the Ball Residence with perhaps an even greater historic value than the Miller Residence.

There was one more Miller residence on the original property. With five growing children and the arrival of his parents, George Miller and Annie Woodgate, from England more living space was needed than the Ball house could offer. Therefore in 1911 Albert built what Charles refers to as the “new” Miller home “...a huge 40’ x 40’ house with ten large rooms about four-hundred yards south of and in line with the old house.” On page 69 of *Valley of the Stave* is a photo taken in 1918 showing “A.G. Miller’s home.” Later this house became one of the buildings of the Twin Maples Correctional Centre, where it was still in use in 1980.

# WHONNOCK'S POST OFFICE TURNING 125 YEARS OLD

*Maple Ridge News* 14 July 2010



Harry Blackwell's rendition of Whonnock's post office as shown on the Community Heritage Commission heritage plaque granted in 2000.

Being at the right place was the first step for the rapid development of Whonnock from a quiet backwater to a vibrant community. The building contract for the trans-continental railroad stipulated that a station had to be constructed every ten miles, and it just so happened that the distance from Port Hammond to Whonnock was ten miles. Consequently, when trains started rolling across Canada in 1886, Whonnock and Port Hammond had a railway station, but Port Haney was out of luck.

There was little else that would have brought a station to Whonnock. A small group of people lived on the Indian Reserve from which Whonnock took its name, and close to the new station was the home of one white settler, a Scot from the Shetlands, Robert Robertson, who had lived there with his wife and children since the early 1860s. Their peace was disturbed by the arrival of crews—mainly Chinese—who carved a track through their land and laid the rails on which plucky little locomotives moved men and material to the head of the line under construction. Even before the arrival of the first transcontinental train local services became available for passengers and freight, but steamers moving up and down the Fraser, offered transportation at a lower cost,

as well as amenities such as a good time, a talk, a drink or two and a card game—if you liked that. To get to Port Haney the best way was to hop on a paddle wheeler, row your own boat, or avail yourself of the strong arms of Robbie Robertson to row you there.

Every one of the new rail stations on the line promised to attract settlers with their needs. Entrepreneurs saw an opportunity to open shop. Noble Oliver came to Whonnock all the way from Ontario, and already in 1884 he had ready for business a general store “adjoining Whonnock station.” In the fall of that year the Post Office Inspector recommended to the Postmaster General in Ottawa that a post office be established in Oliver’s store for the growing community and its surroundings, including the settlers across the Fraser River and in the Stave River area. The inspector thought that the post office could be “...served with mail from the railway from once to three times a week as may be found most convenient.”

And so it happened that starting 1 August 1885, Noble Oliver became the first of a continuous line of a dozen or so Whonnock postmasters. Today Sue Schulze continues the tradition of providing an excellent and essential service, as offered by the Whonnock Post Office for 125 years. To emphasize the uniqueness of this longest surviving post office in Maple Ridge, note that Sue is the only person in the Lower Mainland officially carrying the title “postmaster.”

You are invited to stop by Whonnock’s post office on Friday, July 30<sup>th</sup>, any time between 10:00 and 2:00, to celebrate this 125<sup>th</sup> birthday with Sue and her friends.



# RUSKIN HOTEL

Maple Ridge News 25 August 2010

Published with the title:  
"Ruskin Hotel – Building  
faded away over the years."



The E. H. Heaps & Company building at Ruskin, shown on this 1909 photograph, was massive. Three stories high it stood, south of the rail tracks across from the sawmill at the confluence of the Stave and Fraser rivers. Signs on the building showed that it housed the mill office, a general store (with the post office) and the "Ruskin Hotel," mostly used to accommodate the mill managers and staff. A man called Thomas Moore and his wife Carrie took care of it all. Old-timers would have been surprised to learn that Mr. Moore was a full brother of Edward H. Heaps, the founder and president of the company, or that Thomas Moore (Heaps) was an uncle of Edward Moore Heaps, Edward H. Heaps's oldest son, manager of the Ruskin operation.

September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1909, the date shown on the photo, is when Governor General Earl Grey travelled from Vancouver to Ruskin with a special train to visit the power plant under construction at Stave Falls. CPR put a small station building in front of the Heaps building for the occasion. From that little temporary station horse-drawn carriages took His Excellency and his entourage to the dam. In honour of the Governor General the Heaps people were flying Union Jacks from high masts.

One of the dignitaries travelling with the Governor General from Vancouver was Edward H. Heaps in his capac-

ity as past president of the Vancouver Board of Trade. Heaps, a versatile and progressive entrepreneur was one of a few prominent lumber manufacturers in British Columbia. Aside from the mill at Ruskin his companies owned a substantial wood manufacturing and lumber plant on the Vancouver waterfront and steam- and railway-logging operations in Ruskin and Rivers Inlet. In the last few years, however, his business had been hit by unexpected misfortunes. The mill at Ruskin burned down in the winter of 1904/1905, and hardly had it been reconstructed when the Cedar Cove mill in Vancouver was destroyed by fire

in the fall of 1906. New capital was needed, but interest in the shares of E. H. Heaps & Co. Ltd., incorporated in 1907, was disappointing. A continuing slump in the market aggravated the situation.

In 1910, not even a year after the vice-regal visit to the Stave dam, fire destroyed the mill at Ruskin again. In 1912, promising to rebuild the mill on an even larger scale, Edward H. Heaps left for eastern Canada and England to promote the company's business. Reconstruction of the Ruskin mill had started, but an ever-worsening market turned into a recession and the company, struggling to find new capital and buyers for its products, lost against the competition of newcomers: Stoltze's mill at the Stave River and in particular Abernethy & Lougheed at Port Haney.

The end of Heaps's operations in Ruskin came when in 1915 the holders of a mortgage Heaps had signed in 1911 were allowed by the Supreme Court of BC to secure repayment from the property and assets of E. H. Heaps and Co. Ltd. Many years of litigation followed. Meanwhile the large new factory building stood empty. Hardly used, it burned out, its hulk a Ruskin landmark for decades. Across the tracks the proud building seems just to have faded away unnoticed.

# THE STREETS WHERE WE LIVE

*Maple Ridge News* 13 October 2010

There was a time when everyone knew where everyone lived in Maple Ridge. Street names, even if they existed, were little used, and house numbers were definitely a big-city thing for a distant future. “At Mrs. Bennett’s” was as precise an address as one needed for an appointment. The Royal Mail did not need an address either, because mail was not delivered to homes or businesses. Letters and parcels carried the name of the recipient and the name of the post office where the items would be picked up. A 1908 directory of Maple Ridge residents starts with “Abernethy, John, mill owner; Haney P.O.” Even residents in Port Haney and Port Hammond, with fancy town plans registered in Victoria showing future streets and street names, had to collect their mail at the post office.

In the rural areas outside Haney and Hammond the first street names grew organically rather than by the stroke of a pen. The municipality had to know the location of a steadily growing number of muddy or dusty roads, wooden culverts and bridges, all needing constant repair and maintenance. The local “path-masters” and settlers knew a road or parts of roads by the name of an adjacent farmer: Parker, Laity, Dockstader, Baker, Miller, Webster, Martin, etc. Several of the roads changed names over their length. Present day’s 224th Street carried the name Ontario Street only in Port Haney; it became Best Road north of the Lougheed Highway, and Weeks Road even further north. Not all street names referred to settlers’ names: River Road, Lillooet Road, Town Line Road, Dewdney Trunk Road (from the west, ending into Laity Street!), Whonnock Road (leading into North Whonnock) and Correction Line Road (between Whonnock and Ruskin). There was no official naming of the roads, and the names favoured by the settlers were simply accepted and went into municipal records and maps.

All that changed in 1938 when Council, without public consultation, approved a numbered road system, starting in the west with 1st Avenue (203<sup>rd</sup> Street) and on the south side with 1st Road (96th Avenue in Whonnock and Ruskin). For instance, Ontario Street, Best Road and

Weeks Road became 8th Avenue over its entire length. That certainly simplified finding an address, but many of the old and familiar street names disappeared in the process. Surprisingly there was no public outcry, probably because the loss of the old names went hand in hand with the start of rural delivery of the mail, and this convenience must have outweighed any regrets felt about the loss of the old names. This was progress.

It was a different matter when, only 25 years later, in 1963, Council decided to fall in step with the municipalities across the Fraser and adopted the present system with avenues numbering from the Canada–US border (0 Avenue) and streets from the Strait of Georgia (No. 1 Road in Richmond). It was nothing but an inconvenience for residents, who wondered why Council would adopt what they considered a needless change, and they let Mayor and Council know.

Finding out how streets were named in the past is not always easy. Therefore anyone wanting to know what a street was called way back will be pleased to know that this summer David Tieu, Mapping and Graphics technician at the District of Maple Ridge, encouraged by planner Lisa Zosiak, created two maps for the Community Heritage Commission showing historical street names. The first map shows the original street names and their 1938 replacements, and the second one compares the 1938 street numbers with the present system. We all owe a warm “thank you” to David for this contribution to our history and heritage.

The maps can be viewed or downloaded from the municipal Web site [www.mapleridge.ca](http://www.mapleridge.ca). Open the tag “Municipal Hall,” select “Committees and Commissions” and then “Community Heritage Commission.” For printed copies call Lisa Zosiak at 604.467.7383.

# A GLIMPSE AT MAPLE RIDGE IN 1917

*Maple Ridge News* 22 December 2010

Some years ago, among a few surviving records from the early days of Maple Ridge, I found a notebook attributed to Municipal Clerk D. C. Webber. This notebook contained the results of an enumeration of the District, taken during the First World War. It was not a complete census, just an almost informal taking stock. Was the Clerk instructed by Council to do this survey, and for what purpose was it done? We don't know, but it affords us a unique glimpse at Maple Ridge at that time, like through a window.

The document does not show when the survey was made, but from the dates of the death of two Maple Ridge soldiers we can deduce the approximate time of the enumeration. At that time, of the 137 who had left to serve King and Country, half a dozen soldiers from Maple Ridge had already been killed in action. The last soldier in the survey marked with a "k" (killed) died in November 1916. The next Maple Ridge soldier to be killed in the war was still alive when the survey was taken. He died in August of 1917. This places the time of the survey between November 1916 and August 1917, and likely it was carried out in the spring or summer months.

It appears that in 1917 not more than 2,210 people lived in Maple Ridge. Five hundred and eighty of those were in Hammond (230) and Haney (250). Three hundred and fifty people were counted in Whonnock and Ruskin—east of 264th Street—, and west of 216th Street, outside Hammond, another 420. The remaining 900 or so lived in the area between 216th and 264th Street, but outside Haney.

The majority (1893) of the population was "white." In the minority were Japanese, Chinese and "Hindoo." First Nation's people were not included in the survey. Most Chinese (40 out of 62) and East Indians (12 out of 14) lived in Hammond and were probably employed by Hammond Cedar. The 241 Japanese residents lived all over the District but not in Hammond and not east of 264th Street in Whonnock and Ruskin.

The survey shows in alphabetical order by area the surname and given name of the head of each residence,

followed by a count (but no names) of spouses, sons and daughters, lodgers, tenants, employees and soldiers. For example Mr. R. H. Stephens, a resident of Haney, is listed with one wife (the column is headed "mother"), three sons, one daughter and one soldier. His household did not include lodgers or employees, and the record shows that he owned the land: he was a "freeholder" rather than a "tenant." Mr. Gin Wing, a bachelor also living in Haney, was a tenant. His household comprised seven lodgers, all Chinese—names not recorded.

The survey also counted farm animals. The three Laity households together owned nine horses, 53 milk cows, eight young cattle, 70 poultry and two bee hives; they employed three Chinese. The widowed Mrs. McIver had five horses and five milk cows, two hogs, and 60 chickens. Sheep were rare, and there were only a few goats in the District. Mainly Mr. A. Anderson, who lived west of 216th Street, kept bees. Mr. Yamoto, who lived in the same area, had 300 hogs of the total of 372 hogs kept in the District.

Most households had a few dozen fowl, but many kept hundreds of birds to earn some income from sales to markets in Vancouver and New Westminster. The largest two poultry farms, those of Mr. Macey and Mr. Hill, kept 900 birds each. The total count for poultry in Maple Ridge in 1917 is a stunning 29,000—an average of 13 birds for each resident, man, woman or child, in Maple Ridge.

This local census has meanwhile been published as *Whonnock Notes* No. 17, "Enumeration Maple Ridge 1917"

# RURAL POSTAL DELIVERY CAME TO MAPLE RIDGE IN 1938

*Maple Ridge News* 12 January 2011

Well into the 1930s, as everyone else in Maple Ridge, the residents of Hammond living at some distance from the local post office had to go there to collect their mail and post their letters. In the summer of 1937, 180 residents of the Hammond postal area petitioned the postal authorities in Vancouver to provide rural delivery. That was granted provided a sufficient number of citizens would subscribe living at least one quarter of a mile (400 m) from the post office and prepared to pay \$4 for a post office-supplied post box. In February 1938 that goal was reached and, as the *Weekly Gazette* of February 4 reports, a rural route was to start on February 7.

In a letter the district director of postal services urged the Hammond subscribers to install their post box before the first delivery date and suggested that subscribers advise their correspondents to change their address from "Port Hammond, B.C." (the local post office) to "Rural Route No. 1, Port Hammond, B.C."

Whonnock was given a rural route delivery at about the same time, although there is no mention in the *Gazette* except from a small notice in the February 4 issue asking readers to notify the newspaper of any change of address so as to ensure correct delivery of the paper. "Maybe," the paper suggests, "you are now getting your mail through the new rural delivery services at Whonnock and Hammond."

A surviving blank "tentative application for box," postmarked 5 October 1937, tells us about the planned Whonnock Rural Route No. 1—information that is no longer available for the first Hammond rural route. The postal employee would leave the Whonnock post office at 9:30 in the morning—except Sunday—and go up Whonnock Road (272nd Street). He would turn west on Dewdney Trunk Road, go to and down Baker Road (240th Street), and return to the Whonnock post office via Jackson Road (100th Avenue), Spilsbury Road and Lougheed Highway. Whonnock Rural Route No. 1 therefore not only served the residents of Whonnock but also Websters Corners and Albion. The length of the route may have assured a sufficient number of addresses to warrant a rural delivery. Residents who didn't live

on the "Main Post Road" could also become a subscriber and purchase a "Rural Post Box" for \$4, which they would install on the main road followed by the postal employee. Residents could also share a box, as shown by a surviving approved Rural Mail Delivery application for one post box (approved 31 December 1937) showing the names of three well-known Whonnock neighbours: Messrs. T. Leaf, D. Bell, and G. Tiberghien, all living on what is now 272nd Street.

The postal authorities would stencil a desired name on each post box. It seems that house numbers were not used for mail delivery; probably they did not yet exist for rural areas. The residents had to supply their own posts to support the post boxes. They also received a sheet of "Supplementary Instructions for Erecting Rural Mail Boxes." Weathered and with a few dents showing the battering by several generations of destructive adolescents, a few of these original sturdy post boxes have survived the years. Unlike their American cousins these boxes have no "flags" to be lowered or raised to signal the presence or absence of mail. Instead, signals would be given by turning the box on a base plate. A box turned parallel with the road would tell that the box was empty. When incoming or outgoing mail had been deposited in it, the box would be turned so that the door faced the road. Indeed, not only did the boxes serve for receiving mail, but the postal employees would also collect outgoing mail, a custom that seems to be continued until today by a few old-timers.

In 1938 Mr. Moyer was given the first contract for the new route at Hammond that started on February 7. In Whonnock that honour came to Mr. Charlton. His contract started on 17 January 1938 suggesting that he started his run a few weeks before Mr. Moyer.



"Rural Post Boxes" from the 1930s are still in use today.

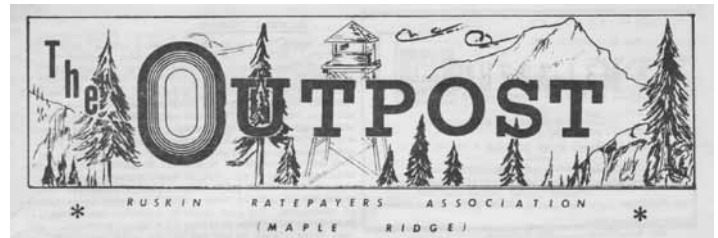
# THE *OUTPOST*: A VOICE FROM THE MARGINS

*Maple Ridge News* 23 February 2011

In 1975 the residents of Ruskin were so unhappy about the poor roads, poor lighting, vandalism, and lack of water in their area that there was talk about secession from Maple Ridge. At a meeting called by the Ruskin Ratepayers Association at the Hoof Beat Corral, a roadside restaurant in Whonnock, the members present decided that one way to be heard would be a newsletter, a forum for the residents, bringing “factual reporting on controversial issues in the Whonnock and Ruskin areas as well as news and sporting activities.” Local businesses assured financial support by advertising.

The first issue of the *Outpost*, numbered “3” for the month, came out in March 1975. The monthly started as any neighbourhood newsletter: the usual letter-size, hand-typed, cut-and-paste bulletin. But by the end of 1975 it had grown into an eight-page, professionally typeset and printed tabloid with a circulation of 3,000. It offered a rich choice of subjects. Aside from a garden column by Wes Frank it had a “Sportsman’s Corner,” a “Fisherman’s Corner,” and there were tasty “budget-beating” recipes, invitations to join the “out of shapers,” announcements of school and community hall activities and tidbits of the goings-on at city hall. A Webster’s Corners column, written by Betty Bagley was a regular. Charles Miller, local historian, and others provided interesting vistas into the past of the community of Ruskin. Preparations were underway for the Ruskin Reunion, the memorable Diamond Jubilee celebration. Public transportation or the lack of it was one major concern. The Maple Ridge Amateur Astronomical Society had plans for an observatory at Stave Falls. There were also plenty of letters to the editor from people wanting to speak their mind, some fearing that with city water, desired by so many, would come development destroying a cherished rural lifestyle. All these pages bring back a not-to-distant past: the worries, joys, interest, and activities of those living in the rural outskirts of Maple Ridge.

Turning out the *Outpost* month after month put a heavy burden on a handful of unpaid volunteers and after a year of hard work the offer by a young man with a background in newspaper work, Steve Woodruff, to run the



*Outpost* was gladly accepted. To assure that the *Outpost* would continue to be a voice of the community, Marjorie Houghton, actively involved as from the first issue, remained on the staff. Consequently The Ruskin News Company took over from the Ruskin Ratepayers Association as from May 1976.

Woodruff immediately doubled the circulation of the *Outpost* to 6,000 copies and published two issues each in May and June but in July he returned to the monthly schedule. The paper now claimed to reach no less than 18,000 homes from Pitt Meadows to Matsqui and, having acquired new production equipment, the *Outpost* was produced entirely in Ruskin by its staff members except for the printing. The December 1976 issue still showed circulation of 16,000 and a wide distribution from Pitt Meadows to Mission. That proved to be unsustainable.

As from May 1977 the Ruskin News Company is no longer displayed as the publisher, and from the September issue we learn that the Outpost Committee would meet at the Hoof Beat Corral to discuss “the survival of this paper.” What was now called the *Outpost Examiner* struggled on until a final March/April 1978 issue. By that time Steve Woodruff and his wife Camille had left Ruskin and returned to Michigan and “hopefully to greener fields,” in the words of Marjorie Houghton, who remained actively involved with the *Outpost* until its final issue.

# BRIDGE OVER WHONNOCK CREEK

*Maple Ridge News* 25 May 2011

Imagine Maple Ridge around 1900 without Lougheed Highway and without motor-cars. People were living in isolated communities, walking for miles, carrying loads, some riding on horseback, others occasionally driving a carts or wagon, all using the unpaved roads, muddy in winter, dusty in summer. For most the Fraser River was still the highway, and the train, available for the last 15 years, was growing in popularity to reach the new city of Vancouver. Stretches of River Road connected only some of the communities on the Fraser River. Dewdney Trunk Road, when it came in 1906, connected the hinterland communities.

“Whonnock and Ruskin, although not more than three miles apart, are as effectively isolated as if on separate islands,” writes Mr. Beckett, Clerk Municipal Council to Mr. Devlin, Indian Agent. The letter written by Mr. Beckett concerned a plan to move the Correction Line road (96th Avenue) down from the upper part of the Whonnock Indian Reserve. The present road crossed Whonnock Creek at an “extensive ravine” with steep grades on both sides of the creek that made it “a steep pull for a team of horses,” and “quite impracticable.” A proper bridge could be built at that spot, but the cost, estimated at \$2,000, was considered prohibitive. By building an alternative road with a crossing of the creek at a better spot, money could be saved. The Municipality therefore endorsed a proposal by Charles Wetham of Ruskin to construct a new road through the Indian Reserve. The deviation would start from 96<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the north-west corner of the Reserve going down to the railroad, where the road would follow the tracks for a short distance and cross Whonnock Creek over a simple trestle bridge. Then the proposed road would climb up again to meet to the 96<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the north-east corner of the Reserve.

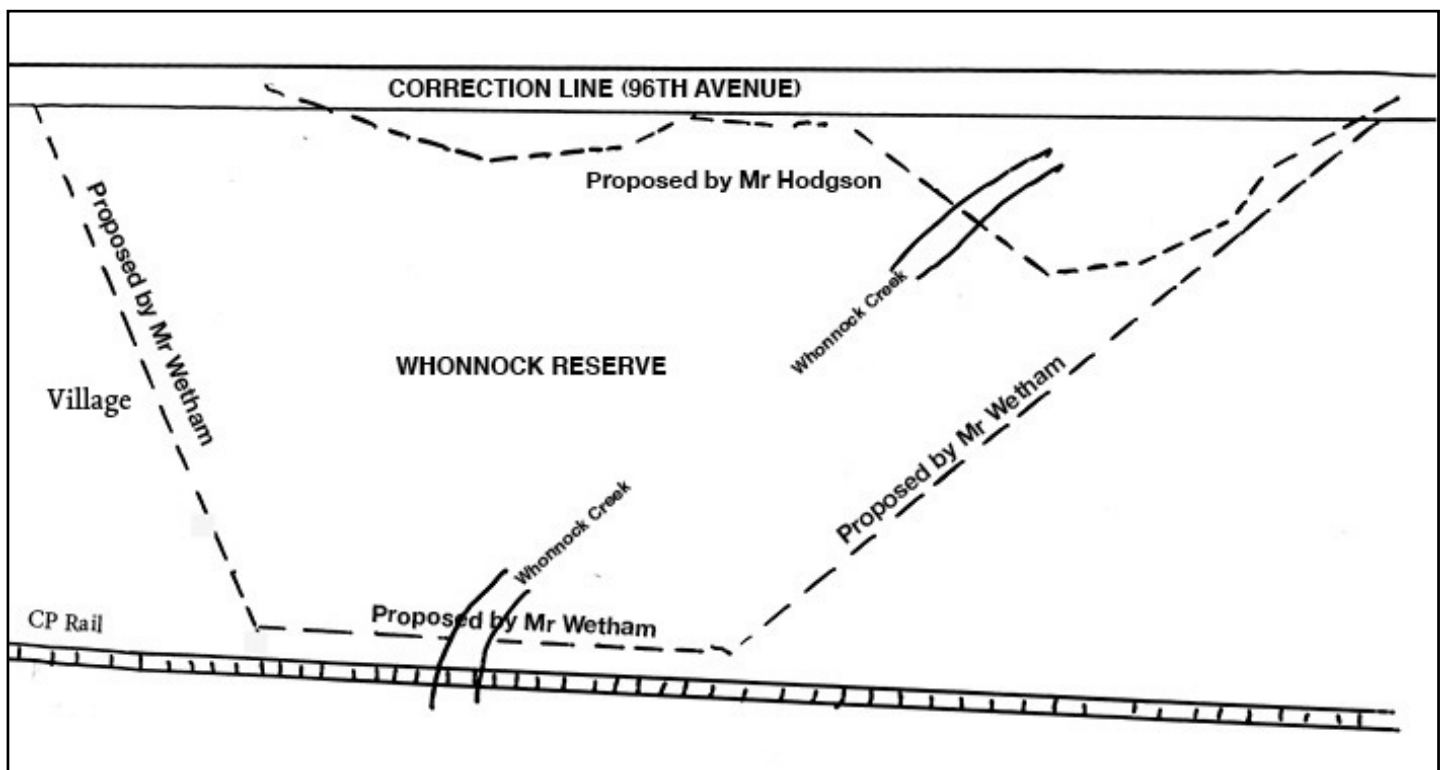
It was assumed by the planners that such a road would be as beneficial to the people on the Reserve as it would be to the white people. In reality Chief Fidelle’s people would have less use for it than suggested, and the new road would encroach on the lives of the residents of the Reserve as it would run straight through the centre of the village and pass their church and a few of their houses by within a few feet. Then there would be the required fencing. The new road would also take away from what little land Chief Fidelle’s people had left that could be used for growing crops.

Taking for granted the consent of Chief Fidelle and his people and without making a formal request to the Indian Agent, arrangements were made to survey the road. Civil Engineer Hill and an assistant arrived by train at Whonnock from New Westminster. Accompanied by Messrs. Whetham and Spilsbury, they entered the Reserve and started work. Everything went all right until they reached the houses and the church and started driving stakes in the ground. As an article in the *Columbian* put it: “This the Indians objected to. They [the surveyors] were ordered to desist, and finally the Indian women pulled up the stakes and assumed such a threatening attitude, that the surveyor and those who accompanied him, were forced to leave the reserve.” After hearing Chief Fidelle’s people, the Indian Agent recommended and Indian Affairs agreed that

this plan be dropped, its only object being some money savings for Maple Ridge at the detriment of the residents of the Reserve.

A few years later, the people of Ruskin and Whonnock did get the desired improvement of the road connecting the two villages although not the new road promoted by Council in 1901 and rejected by Chief Fidelle's people. From the beginning Councillor T.J. Hodgson had voiced his objection to Mr. Wetham's plan. He had proposed only a slight deviation mainly away from the steep ravine, thus reducing the grades and allowing the construction of a smaller bridge. Council had first rejected Hodgson's plan as impractical, but in the end Hodgson's deviation found approval by all parties concerned.

In the 1930s, after the construction of the Lougheed Highway, 96<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Correction Line Road) lost its importance as a through road between Ruskin and Whonnock, and the part of the road on the Reserve was closed off for public use. It is now overgrown, and the bridge is long gone.



The two proposed deviations of 96th Avenue in the Whonnock Reserve (1901). The residents of the reserve vehemently rejected Mr. Whetham's proposal but accepted Mr. Hodgson adjustments of the road.

# GOLDEN DREAMS IN OUR LOCAL MOUNTAINS

*Maple Ridge News* 13 July 2011

In 1897 John Williamson, father-in-law of Whonnock shopkeeper L.C. York, kept a diary in which he reflects on what was going on in and around Whonnock that year. The general store owned by York was the hub of the region. It was close to the railway station and had a wharf on the Fraser where paddle wheelers made regular calls. The store also housed the regional post office and a telegraph office. Every settler, newcomer, or visitor stopped by, even if just to have a chat or get information. John Williamson's diary is filled with notes about what he heard from that steady stream of pioneers visiting the store. One of his personal interests was something that was a source of great excitement in the neighbourhood: prospecting for gold.

The discoveries in the booming Kootenays nurtured this agitation and encouraging mineral finds at Harrison Lake and the upper Kanaka Creek in 1896 turned everyone with time on their hands into a prospector. All over the mountainous North Shore and the outcroppings of the Fraser Valley people looked for precious metals. Not only the local people were attracted, but also many outsiders, mostly Americans from across the border. Although the Harrison Lake area caught most of the attention, dozens of "prospects" were recorded as claims from the Whonnock, Ruskin and Stave Lake area, with fancy names such as Yellow Jacket, Morning Glory, Meadow Lark. John Williamson's own "Old Man" claim was at Harrison Lake.

As is evident from the diary, speculation was rampant, and there was obviously more interest in selling "prospects" than to develop the claims or "mines," as Williamson liked to call them. Most prospectors lacked capital or were hesitant to put their own money at risk for developing their claim as required by law. It became a game of bluff poker with potential buyers, and the winner could earn hundreds of dollars if he sold his claim. Not surprisingly only a few claims in the area were actually developed, but some "mines" have survived until modern times and are mentioned in Charles Miller's book *The Golden Mountains*. They are still visited by treasure hunters today.



Illustration by the late Clinton Gadsby for his poem "Pitt Lake Curse."

The diary shows that mostly expert workers from outside the community were hired by the buyers to work on the claims. Some came from as far as Bellingham. Secrecy may have been a reason why no local labour was hired because even if development showed that the claim was worthless, it could still be resold if no one locally knew it.

As the year progressed and summer came along, most of the aspiring prospectors returned to mundane jobs to earn cash to put bread on the table, finding work in the woods or preparing for the fishing season. The Fraser salmon run of 1897 was one of the largest on record, but the canneries could not handle the quantities offered, and their low prices—if they wanted to buy at all—turned potential prosperity into a great disappointment for the fishermen.

Then, one day that summer as Williamson's diary shows, word reached the settlers about the treasures of the Klondike. It let people forget about the Kootenays and their own local "mines" and the disastrous fishing season. As the year ended, dreams of instant prosperity revived the spirit of many of the younger men planning to go north to the Yukon and Alaska the following spring. And they did.



# REMEMBERING THOSE VIGILANT RANGERS

*Maple Ridge News* 9 November 2011

In 1919 King George V dedicated Remembrance Day to honour specifically members of the armed forces who were killed during World War I. Today Veterans Affairs Canada considers Remembrance Day a tribute to “the men and women who have served, and continue to serve our country during times of war, conflict and peace.”

Among the many men and women who served our country during the Second World War were the members of the PCMR, Pacific Coast Militia Rangers—they had military status. After the war, although proud of their service, the men serving as Rangers never boasted about their support to the war effort since they felt that their efforts paled in comparison with the sacrifices made by our armed forces overseas. Still their dedication and hard work should not be forgotten.

The PCMR was formed early in 1942 to assist in the protection of BC and to calm public anxiety after Pearl Harbour over Japanese attacks on the BC coast. The PCMR was an unpaid force outside the main cities. Its volunteer members, commonly known as Rangers, were men who were not eligible to serve overseas because of their age, a disability, or their work. Some were of retirement age and others as young as fifteen years. They offered a great variety of capabilities, expertise and experience. All were familiar with their local environment and that knowledge could be used to guide military personnel if needed. Their regular duties: to patrol their area, spot and report any findings of suspicious nature and to prepare for guerrilla warfare against a Japanese invasion.

By the spring of 1943 some fifteen thousand men had been organized in 126 companies. Two of those companies were in Maple Ridge: the 60th Company Whonnock and the 61st Company Haney. The territory of the Whonnock Company included Whonnock, Ruskin, and Silverdale across Stave River. The Haney Company covered the remainder of Maple Ridge as well as Pitt Meadows. Reporting to Haney Company were “Detachments” formed in neighbourhoods under their surveillance.

A Ranger’s main requirement was to perfect his knowledge of the country about him as quickly as possible. Until the PCMR was disbanded in 1945, intensive training, executing duties, and “practical, realistic group manoeuvres” left little leisure for these men, most of whom had a full-time job. A guide in the training was the publication *The Ranger*. Its first issue in September 1942 contains an illustrated report on a training manoeuvre of the Whonnock Company at Silverdale. The guideline: “Every man must be given the indispensable minimum of a ‘general idea,’ so that each man can act on his own initiative if needs be, for a period, when isolated from command.”

The *Ranger* was filled with useful information a well-rounded Ranger should know such as: “Know where to shoot,” “Edible plants,” “Dig or die,” “What can you do with a tarp,” and “How to recognize a Jap.” If you want answers to those questions, the Maple Ridge Museum & Archives has a full set of *The Ranger* to research.

The activities of the local Rangers, military and socially, were sometimes mentioned in the *Gazette*, and occasionally the Maple Ridge PCMR companies even caught the eye of a Vancouver newspaper.



The Whonnock Company came to the attention of the Vancouver Province in 1943 when its members constructed an aircraft detection post. The story did not tell that the base of the structure was an outhouse the girls of Whonnock School did no longer need—by then the school had inside plumbing. Crowning the former outhouse was the belfry of St. Paul's, the former Anglican Church, providing an excellent lookout for spotting aircraft. The old belfry was glazed-in providing shelter from the elements for the women and men on duty.

Earlier that same year the Province reported about the Haney Company's activities in Websters Corners: "Fifty Pacific Coast Rangers armed with rifles, Sunday, were called out to kill off a pack of wolf-dogs in the Websters Corners district near Haney." That hunt may have been an exciting diversion from the routine work, but it also provided an excellent training exercise and an assurance to the public that the Rangers would defend them.

As the end of the war approached, in January 1945, the Japanese started launching bomb-carrying balloons designed to fall on North America. The Rangers played an important part in visually detecting and reporting the balloons with their deadly loads and ensuring that they were disarmed or destroyed. At last the Rangers had a chance to show their operational skills in reality and show the value of the PCMR in the defense of British Columbia.

Members of 60th Company Whonnock at the Ruskin Store on their way to a training exercise at Silverdale. The two young men up front are Glen Elwood (?) to the left and Christopher (Kit) Benson, right. Kit Benson is probably the only PCMR member sitting on that pickup truck still alive today. Photo: *The Ranger*.



# DESTRUCTION OF A COMMUNITY

Maple Ridge News 14 December 2011



Ruskin school 1936 – 1937.

“One Book Whonnock” is an initiative by Jean Davidson (604-462-7341) and Sue Adair (604-462-7520) to get residents of eastern Maple Ridge to share and enjoy a good read, to discuss a book with each other and to learn more about the subject in the process. The book read and talked about is *Obasan* by Joy Kagawa, dealing with measures taken by the Canadian government against the Japanese living in coastal British Columbia during the Second World War.

As the One Book project develops, it is becoming clear how valuable this discussion is. Few of the current readers are aware that in the 1920s and 1930s Japanese, born overseas or in Canada, formed a substantial part of the population of Whonnock and Ruskin. They were not just a minority. School photos give us an idea of the number of Japanese living in the area in the 1930s. A Ruskin school photo of 1936-1937 shows only a handful of white faces among the 27 students. In Whonnock slightly more than half the students in Miss Ferguson’s classes were Japanese at that time.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbour in December 1941, now 70 years ago, the Canadian Government evicted the Japanese from their lands and homes and sent them away to live in camps in the interior. With the white population looking on, the Japanese of East Maple Ridge, with no more than they could carry, boarded a train that stopped at Ruskin.

After the war old-timers did not talk much about the former Japanese residents and what had happened to them. Speaking about the history of the Ruskin school, prob-

ably in the late 1950s, local historian Charles Miller only mentioned the “influx” of the Japanese in the Ruskin area in one sentence. He could hardly have overlooked the pre-war presence of the Japanese kids attending that school, but in the 1950s neither Miller nor his audience were ready to be reminded of the Japanese or their fate.

Until they were evicted the hard-working, energetic and frugal Japanese turned even poor soils into fertile agricultural lands and produced the best strawberry crops we’ve ever known. They were very active in the lumber industry as well, but Japanese were not allowed to fish the river. Anti-Japanese sentiments and anti-Japanese discrimination had been part of life in BC for a long time. Protection was thought necessary since the Japanese were believed to be stealing the livelihood of the white man—perhaps a fear of Japanese superiority.

The Japanese in Maple Ridge did not escape racial discrimination or anti-Japanese sentiments. In his book *History of the Haney Nokai*, Yasutaro Yamaga gives us an example. It was custom to choose the May Queen and the Maids of Honour from Maple Ridge’s elementary schools, but a May Day planning committee meeting in 1927 decided to include the youngest and smallest girl attending MacLean High School as a Maid of Honour. The committee asked Mr. English, principal of MacLean for his recommendation, and the reply from the principal was read at the following meeting: “As the youngest and most pretty, I recommend Yaeko Fujishige.”

That response shocked and enraged many of the women representing the elementary schools at the meeting. Normally children of Japanese descent were not given any prominence during events held at their schools, and now a Japanese girl would be a Maid of Honour? Out of the question! The reactions were fierce: “She must be a citizen of England!” “Children whose parents don’t have voting rights are not eligible.” Defenders of the principal’s choice were attacked from all sides. After two hours of angry debate a motion was tabled to ignore the principal’s choice and have the selection done by the votes of MacLean’s students. At that point Mrs. Poole, who chaired the meeting, had enough. She pounded the table and said: “We should be ashamed of ourselves. I ask that the mover and the seconder withdraw the motion. If you will not do it, I resign not only as chair but also from the school board.” Mrs. Poole, mother of well-known Louise Poole, was school trustee and vice president of the May Day Committee. Not a word about the controversy appeared in the *Gazette*, although the editor of the weekly, Mr. J. J. Dougan, was present at the meeting.

On the front page of the *Gazette* of May 26<sup>th</sup> appeared a detailed report of the coronation of Queen Olga of Whonnock—the future wife of Teddy Lee—and the festivities of that day. A list with the names of Maids of Honour included the name of high-school student Yaeko Fujishige. She was the first and perhaps also the last student of Japanese descent to be nominated for that position.

# CHARLES WHETHAM AND THE RUSKIN CO-OPERATIVES

*Maple Ridge News* 27 March 2012

Members of the Canadian Co-operative Society, formed in Mission, BC, in 1895, bestowed the name “Ruskin Mills” to a sawmill and a settlement at the mouth of the Stave River.

Charles Whetham, a scholar, respected justice of the peace and school trustee, had proposed the name after John Ruskin, the prominent British art and social critic of the time.

The choice of this name for the venture at the Stave is a surprise, for the goals and objectives of the society did not emphasize the common good and well-being of its members, as would have been expected of a co-operative inspired by the writings of Ruskin. But what was perhaps not reflected in the wording of the constitution and bylaws of the Canadian Co-operative Society was nonetheless the spirit of the society: Ruskin’s social ideas were frequently discussed at length at discussion meetings, in which Whetham, an amiable and gregarious man, took an active part.

At first the Canadian Co-operative Society was a success. In 1897 the Society counted 54 members, most living close to the mill. There they had built homes and barns and a boarding house. Aside from the sawmill and a logging operation, the members had set up a general store, a smithy, and a shoemaker’s shop. They also ran a dairy and a vegetable farm. Not less than 50 children attended the first school when it started in the spring of 1897. A post office opened on New Year’s Day 1898. “Ruskin Mills” was a company town, but in this case its residents owned the company. Unfortunately in the course of another year the society failed to meet its financial obligations and disbanded.

There is a little-known and so far unpublished follow-up to this story. As the Ruskin experiment at Stave River came to an end, some of the former members were obviously not ready to let go of their dream and decided

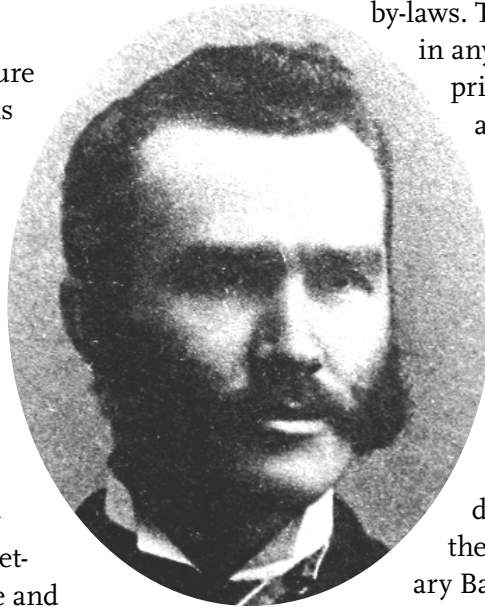
to form a new Ruskin-inspired co-operative. On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1899, nine men and women gathered at Charles Whetham’s home to sign in his presence as magistrate and witness a letter of intent to establish a new society named “The Industrial Union” with headquarters at Ruskin, BC. Whetham may well have been the author of the letter of intent as well as its constitution and

by-laws. The object of the society was “to engage in any and every branch of industry on the principle of association.” First and foremost among the purpose of the society were the welfare of the community and its individual members.

Shortly after incorporation, in March of 1899, the secretary of the Industrial Union reported to the famous Ruskin Colony in Tennessee: “We have but a small organization and are as yet homeless, but we are harmonious beyond my fondest hopes and are doing well financially.” The members on the Industrial Union moved to the Boundary Bay area and now focused on farming and raising livestock. However, after efforts to purchase the land at an acceptable price failed, the economic viability of the enterprise became questionable. Then members started to disperse and some of the leaders even drifted back to Ruskin.

The co-operative emitted its last gasp on Vancouver Island at Turgoose (Saanichton), where Henderson’s Directory of 1900-1901 lists the Industrial Union and the names of three of its members. Surprisingly Charles Whetham was there as well, perhaps in an effort to keep the dream of a Ruskin-inspired commune alive. Nothing more was heard about the Industrial Union.

In 1903 Charles Whetham sold the house in Ruskin that he had built and where he and his family had lived for 12 years. They moved to farmland in the United States not far from Niagara. In the words of Rev. Dunn, Whetham’s departure left the local settlers with “a feeling of deep disappointment and genuine regret.”



# PIONEER GRAVES IN WHONNOCK

*Maple Ridge News* 10 July 2012

The Whonnock cemetery is one of the most peaceful places in Maple Ridge. Tucked away in a dead-end street and partially shaded by mature trees, it is well worth a visit, either to explore the weathered headstones of pioneer settlers or to just enjoy the quietness.

Members of the Norwegian community, first established the cemetery, or rather a portion of it, in 1905. They even built their own small wooden church and for many years held Lutheran services there in Norwegian. Prominent among the Norwegian settlers were Ole Lee, or “Lie” in Norwegian, and his wife Jorgine, as well as the Nelson family, whose graves can still be found in this part of the cemetery. Originally the Norwegians were fishermen, but several of the menfolk were lured away by the promise of finding gold in the Klondike and spent years away from Whonnock prospecting. Over time more of the descendants moved away, and those who remained didn’t speak Norwegian any longer, so in 1958 the wooden church was finally dismantled. Still, Teddy and Hank Lee, grandsons of Ole and Jorgine, continued to take care of this part of the cemetery and in 1982 were able to produce a plan of the graves, of which many were unmarked.

In 1919 the Maple Ridge municipality acquired the part of land to the east for use as the municipal cemetery. But it was not until 1982 that the two cemeteries were joined, with the municipality becoming the sole owner.

The first to be buried in this new, municipal part was Annie Buckley, who died in February 1922. She was the daughter of Noble and Catherine Oliver, who died in 1923 and 1932 respectively and whose graves are right beside that of their daughter. Noble Oliver built the first store in Whonnock when the railroad came through and was the first postmaster. He was also a one of the first school trustees and donated the land where St. Paul’s was built, the first Anglican church in Whonnock.

In this part of the cemetery you can find the grave of Reeve Ferguson, who is said to have wished “to be buried between two strangers.” Also buried here are the parents and grandparents of Ruskin historian Charles

Miller, whose book *The Valley of the Stave* tells the story of their arrival and settlement in this area.

Another noteworthy Whonnockian was Fred Showler, who was buried here beside his wife Emma. Showler owned and operated the “Red and White Store” next to the post office from 1921 to 1946.

Other graves are those of Richard Stanley Whiting, his wife, and his daughter. Whiting served as Whonnock postmaster for forty-five years! A nearby grave is that of his mother-in-law “Granny” Benson, who was much loved in the community and who named her small house on what is now Byrnes Road “Crowsnest.”

The oldest grave marker, though not the oldest grave, in this part of the cemetery is an upright stone cross in the northeast corner, commemorating Ann (Robertson) Watson, who died in 1922. More Watsons are buried nearby. The old Watson family home still stands on the northeast corner of 272<sup>nd</sup> Street and Bell Avenue.

There are graves of many of Whonnock’s Japanese families, including Hidaka, Natsuhara, Fujita, and Mukaida, to name a few. Many, too many, of their children are buried here.

There are numerous unmarked graves on the Whonnock cemetery, and the names on several grave markers have weathered away. To find out who is buried where, there is *Whonnock Notes* No. 2 “Cemeteries in Whonnock.”

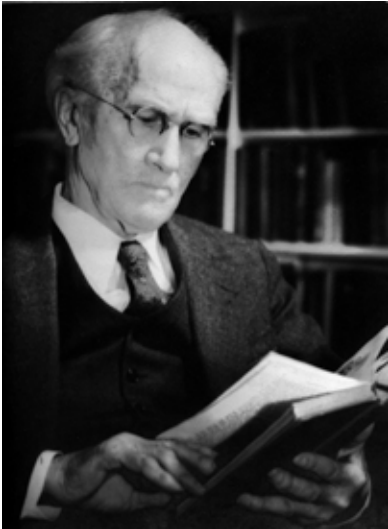


The Norwegian Lutheran Church stood on the Whonnock Cemetery. It was built in 1905 and dismantled in 1958.  
Drawing by Mary Flatla.



# THE WHETHAMS—TRIED AND VALUED FRIENDS

Maple Ridge News 22 August 2012



Charles Whetham, Westfield, Chautauqua NY, ca. 1936.

Today the name of Charles Whetham is not heard very often, but around 1900 he was a Justice of the Peace and a respected figure in Whonnock and the community that at his suggestion was named “Ruskin.” As Robert Manzer put it, he was the “councilor and friend of all settlers wise enough to seek his advice.” We know that he called his home “Walden” after Thoreau’s famous

cabin in the woods of Massachusetts—perhaps in jest, because it was a mansion by local standards. We also know that in 1899 the Whethams donated part of their land to build a school in Ruskin when the old one near the Stave River could no longer be used. Charles Whetham was an invaluable member of the Ruskin school board during the construction and the first years of the new school bringing with him influence and experience in education and in serving as secretary of the Whonnock school board a few years.

What was not known before is that Charles Whetham ran for the position as MLA in the 1898 and 1900 provincial elections. He did not win, but the results, published in the newspapers of the day, show that an astonishing percentage of residents of the Whonnock area supported him: 92% and 75% respectively. (The drop in percentage between the two years may be attributed to the 1899 departure of the members of the commune in Ruskin, where he was also held in high esteem.)

How much the community respected Charles Whetham is also shown in a farewell letter to him written in February 1903 by the Reverend Alexander Dunn. The news of Whetham’s departure from Ruskin, writes Dunn,

Published with the title: “He called his home Walden, gave area the name Ruskin.”

pervaded the community with “a feeling of deep disappointment and genuine regret.” Over time Whetham had grown in the esteem and confidence of the people and through his “uniform civility, evenness of temper, and unselfish and considerate deeds” had acquired a large circle of loyal friends.

Dunn continues to say that Whetham, enterprising and public-spirited, was always ready to give his support to and use his influence for any movement to advance the wellbeing of the community. “Whatever work you put your hand to,” says Dunn’s letter, “whether planting an orchard, or writing out deeds and other documents, you have executed in a masterly way, leaving no room for corrections or amendments.”

The letter goes on to tell that in reclaiming and improving his property Whetham “gave employment to, and circulated money among many struggling settlers.” The settlers found him “fair and reasonable” in his demands and “prompt and cheerful” in his payments.

Dunn writes that Whetham’s “calm, kind, and soothing words” would be missed, and he assures him that should he ever return he would be given a “most cordial welcome” as a “tried and valued friend.”

The Reverend Dunn then turns to Mrs. Whetham who, he writes, always “nobly aided and encouraged” the good work of her husband. She would be missed as organist of the Sunday services and for her “genial presence and efficient services” at social gatherings. To that Dunn adds: “Wise and prudent, a lover of peace and hater of discord, you ever did what you could to allay bitterness, to discourage backbiting and slander, and to promote unity and goodwill.”

Few of our residents will ever have received the praises Charles and Fannie Whetham received from the people of Whonnock and Ruskin. The original letter, signed by Reverend Dunn and other settlers, remained in the family’s possession until this summer, when it came back to Whonnock through the kindness of one of Charles and Fannie’s great-granddaughters, who lives in Portland, MA.

# BC'S LARGEST SHINGLE MILL WAS IN RUSKIN

*Maple Ridge News* 9 October 2012

Stoltze Manufacturing Co. is mostly forgotten today, but for more than a decade before the 1930s their mill at the Stave River—where the trailer park is today—was the largest shingle mill in British Columbia.

Although the company carried the Stoltze name, the president of the company was a James Sobey, born in England and raised in Nova Scotia. In the late 1890s Sobey and some partners started a shingle mill with the name Sobey Manufacturing Co. at Ballard, now part of Seattle, and another one at Granite Falls, WA.

Two Stoltze brothers worked at Sobey's Granite Falls plant. Henry Stoltze was foreman of the mill and Arthur Stoltze was "knot sawyer." Around 1910 Sobey sold his share in the Granite Falls enterprise and planned the opening of a mill at Ruskin in partnership with Henry Stoltze. The new company was called Stoltze Manufacturing Co.

James Flaherty, Henry's brother-in-law, who had also been working for Sobey at Granite Falls, went to Ruskin in the summer of 1912 to build the shingle mill. The beginning of production in 1913 happened to coincide with a slump in the building industry in Vancouver, but access to the American market assured that the Ruskin mill worked to its full capacity. They even added a new dry kiln to the Ruskin mill "to meet the increase in demand."

James Sobey, president of Stoltze Manufacturing Co., was a silent partner, while Henry A. Stoltze, as managing director, took care of the company's business from an office in Vancouver. Arthur H. Stoltze, his brother, managed bolt cutting on a big scale at Stave Falls, and James Flaherty was in charge of the entire operation in Ruskin.

To secure an ample supply of cedar, Stoltze first acquired 1,000 acres of standing timber at an unknown location in the Stave area and in addition bought "large quantities" of cedar from Abernethy-Lougheed when A&L won the contract for 8,000 acres of timber at Stave Lake in 1914.

The *Pacific Coast Lumberman* of July 1919 reports: "About 250 men are employed in [Stoltze's] limits and the average daily input in bolts is 135 cords." Stoltze had mile-long flumes to take the shingle bolts down to Stave Lake. A spillway at the dam took the bolts down to the river below to float to the mill. In 1923 only Stoltze (400,000) and Fraser Mills (350,000) produced more shingles per day than the next best mill (200,000). Stoltze was then a very successful company.

The Stoltzes and the Flahertys were close-knit families as is evident from entries in the "Ruskin Notes," the social column of the *Weekly Gazette*, telling about their frequently visiting each other in Vancouver or Ruskin. Their "motoring" included trips to the United States calling on family and friends. The most spectacular trip recalled was one undertaken in 1923 by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Stoltze who "motored" to California and Mexico and back, mostly camping on the way.

In 1926, with access to cedar reduced in the Stave Lake area, Stoltze purchased extensive timber berths on Blue Mountain along Dewdney Trunk Road. As the operation at Stave Lake diminished, Arthur Stoltze's position became redundant. He moved away from Ruskin and later joined his son Virgil in logging operations at Harrison Lake, Squamish, and on Vancouver Island.

The following year, 1927, James Flaherty retired, and a son of managing director Henry Stoltze took over the supervision of a now very reduced operation at Ruskin. Not much later the two original partners died; first James Sobey at Ballard in 1930 and a year later Henry Stoltze in Vancouver. By then Stoltze Manufacturing Co. was only a minor shingle producer, struggling for survival. Henry's son remained in charge of the mill at Ruskin until 1936, when it changed its name and management. What was once BC's largest shingle mill stopped its operation in the early 1940s and started slipping away from memory.



# THORNHILL: A VIBRANT COMMUNITY

*Maple Ridge News* 28 November 2012



The Thornhill Elementary School opened in 1959 with two teachers: Mrs. Norman and Mr. Peacock. This is Margaret Norman's class of 1959–1960.

Grant Hill, rising prominently above the surrounding land northeast of Albion, is generally known as Thorn Hill or Thornhill after James Thorne, who took out a Crown Grant for 160 acres east of 240<sup>th</sup> Street (Baker Road) and north of 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The slope of the hill stretches along the Fraser River from Albion to Whonnock. At both ends and along the Fraser the land rises steeply, offering spectacular views. The slope along the Fraser and behind the Whonnock post office quickly became a preferred residential area.

What attracted settlers to the lower parts of Grant Hill even more than the view was access to the river (the highway of its day), the railroad, store and post office. The higher land further away from the river, the Thornhill area of today, was too far away from the amenities of civilization and only became inhabited after the arrival of the automobile. Before that time Ashton W. Spilsbury's 160 acres, above 98<sup>th</sup> Avenue on top of Spilsbury Road, was considered to be in Whonnock, though it included the core of today's Thornhill. Even after the automobile opened the Thornhill area for settlement, it continued to be seen as part of the historical communities Whonnock or Albion.

In the years following the First World War Japanese farmers started settling in the Thornhill area. Thirteen Japanese farming families owned acreage West of 256<sup>th</sup> Street, and another fifteen lived east of 256<sup>th</sup> Street. They were among the first to open the land for agriculture. After the Japanese were evicted in 1942, their lands became available to a growing community of young white settlers and their families.

In the early 1960s a door-to-door survey was held to establish the boundaries of Whonnock. This was done as part of a successful community effort to restore a second “n” to the name Whonnock that had been lost just before the war. Residents living in the Thornhill area east of 256th Street did not hesitate to identify themselves with Whonnock as their place of residence, but at the same time they were aware that the Thornhill area was a neighbourhood by itself within Whonnock.

The 1950s and 1960s were the time of the birth of Thornhill as a community. This was when Thornhill got its own school. At first the Thornhill youngsters attended the Whonnock School, but in 1959 the number of children in the area justified the opening of an elementary school in the centre of Thornhill. Margaret Norman taught at that school in the early years and recalls the energy and enthusiasm of the neighbourhood.

Before long the Thornhill Community Association came to life, and the members started fundraising for the construction of a community hall. The hall was a tiny affair, but as from 1965 the proud residents of Thornhill had a meeting place of their own. Even the Whonnock Women’s Institute preferred meeting at the new Thornhill hall rather than in the derelict Whonnock Memorial Hall of which they were the custodians.

Before 1950 the *Gazette* and other newspapers never mention Thornhill as a distinct area or community in Maple Ridge. In 1952 the *Gazette* reports about the first anniversary of the Thorn Hill Women’s Institute, carefully adding “(Whonnock)” behind the name to clarify the location for the readers. It would be a long time before the newspapers and their readers recognized the location of Thornhill.

It was only during the last decade or so that the location of the Thornhill area became generally known and started to be referred to as a distinct community. An impetus came from the well-published and worthy action of Betty and Klaus von Hardenberg and their neighbours to protect what became known as the Thornhill aquifer, threatened by the advance of new development encroaching from Albion. However, the main publicity of the name came from the real estate profession, who prefer the name Thornhill over Albion or, even worse, Whonnock.

The Thornhill Community Association continues to thrive, and the Thornhill Hall, more spacious now than it was at first, is still well used by the community. Thornhill may not be as old as the historical communities of Maple Ridge, but what it lacks in years, it makes up in energy and vibrancy.

# THREE PAMPHLETS

# Mr. Methot and the Burning of the Whonnock Store



*The Whonnock Store was built around 1885 on land purchased by Noble Oliver from Robert Robertson. After Noble Oliver the owners of the store and the postmasters were George A. Smith, L.C. York, and Richard Whiting. York's father in law, John Williamson, wrote a diary when living in the store in 1897. The site is now under the Loughheed Highway. Mission Community Archives.*

## **An unknown Whonnock store keeper.**

IT STARTED ALL WITH A PHONE CALL. One day in the summer of 1998 Clair Methot called from Vernon "My grandfather," he said, "had a shop in Whonnock." Did I know about that? I didn't, but would try to find out. Clair Methot said that he had two letters his grandfather wrote to his daughter, Charlotte, then living in Montreal. The first letter was dated September 1915 and a second one was dated February 1916. Both were written on stationery of the Whonnock Store, his grandfather's name, J[oseph] H. Methot, printed on the stationery.

According to local lore Whonnock's general store, dating back at least to the 1885, burnt down some time in 1911, when it was owned by Richard C. Whiting. Did Mr. Methot perhaps own a store in Whonnock after this mishap? Why didn't someone remember him having a store? It was unlikely that he would have managed Graham's store, built around 1912, and Luno's shop had yet to be opened, but perhaps he ran a store on that location after Mrs. Sutherland left? (see *Whonnock Notes* #4, page 24).

## **Who was Joe Methot?**

What about Joe Methot himself? Clair Methot's grandfather was born around 1866 in St. Zotique, just south of Montreal, son of a family of farmers. He married Kathleen Spencer and their first child, Charlotte Methot,

was born in Owen Sound. The young family came west, where Joe Methot was customs officer at Myncaster, a few miles south of Greenwood. Myncaster and its better-known neighbour Phoenix have long since disappeared. The Methot's second child, a son, Ernest Spencer Methot, Clair's father, was born in Greenwood around 1902. Ernest was only ten years old when his mother died in 1912. Not too long after his wife's death, Joe Methot left the Greenwood area, perhaps for New Westminster, before moving to Whonnock. His son, Ernest, was with him in Whonnock. Joe returned to New Westminster, where he died in 1931. He worked as warehouseman for Canadian Pacific Railways for some time.

The children, Charlotte and Ernest Spencer were educated in Montreal, where Joe had two or three sisters. Ernest went on to McGill where he received his 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Steam Engineering papers. Both Charlotte and Ernest returned to British Columbia. Charlotte worked in Vancouver for many years as a secretary-receptionist for a real-estate firm. Ernest lived and worked in the Maple Ridge. That is the information received from Clair Methot.

### **Confirmation of Joe Methot's stay.**

It was not easy to confirm even Joe Methot's stay in Whonnock. Joe Methot did not own land in Whonnock and the directories of the years of the First World War generally ignore Whonnock. There wasn't a break in the postmastership of Richard Whiting either.

However, there was some evidence that Mr. Methot had a shop in Whonnock. In the minutes of the Norwegian Lutheran Women's Association is an entry for 5 June 1915 reading that: "Mrs. A[xel] B. Lee was elected to spend some money from the cash box and buy fabric at Methot's." (WHONNOCK NOTES No. 3, page 33). In the minutes of the Ladies Club, to be renamed a few years later to Whonnock Memorial Hall, Mr. Methot was also mentioned.

2 June 1915

Moved by Mrs. Black, seconded Mrs. Watson. That we buy stove offered us by Mr. Methot for \$35.00....

7 July 1915

Moved Mrs. Black, seconded Miss Agnes Kirby. That we pay half the amount due on stove purchased from Mr. Methot, viz. \$15.00 instead of whole sum.

3 November 1915

Moved Mrs. Gill, seconded Mrs. Watson. That Mrs. Methot's account (\$22.30) ... be paid.

The minutes of the Ladies Club of 5 April 1916 also mentioned a "new post office" where they would hang the Roll of Honour of those serving in the C.E.F. for a month, "in order to encourage recruiting." Apparently the Whonnock post office, which had been in the old Whonnock store since 1885 had moved to its new location shortly before April 1916. Could it be that the old store burned in 1916 and not in 1911 as assumed previously?



## Cold winters

I searched *The British Columbian*—the weekly edition version is now available on microfilm at the Maple Ridge Public Library—for information about the weather. Unusually severe winter weather did indeed prevail. More than 29 inches of snow had fallen in January and the average temperature for January was 24.0, well below freezing and some 10 degrees below the average mean temperature recorded over the previous thirty years. *The British Columbian* reported on 8 February 1861 that a strong southeast wind was blowing snow off the roofs in New Westminster, adding to the traffic problems on the streets. During the first days of February Victoria's vehicular traffic came to a standstill due to the steady snowfall. Supplies could not reach the stores and many were closed because the employees could not come to work.

Judge Howay reminded the readers that even worse winters were reported in the past. In 1862 ice appeared on the river on 1 January and the Fraser was completely frozen in a matter of slightly more than a week. Harrison Lake and other lakes were frozen at the end of January. The ice was more than a foot thick at Sapperton on 12 February. —Sleighs were running from Langley to several miles below New Westminster.—Some persons walked to New Westminster from Hope over the frozen river.

In 1916 the weather was not as severe as in the early 1860s. On 15 February, *The British Columbian* reported improvements in the weather and predicted an end to the unusual "Eastern winter." Joe Methot must have breathed a sigh of relief when normal seasonal weather returned to the Lower Mainland. Then, there it was all at once in *The British Columbian* of 21 March 1916:

### WHONNOCK STORE BURNED.

WHONNOCK, March 15.—Starting, it is believed, from a defective stovepipe, fire broke out early yesterday morning in the store owned by Mr. J. H. Methot, at Whonnock, and within two hours had left nothing but a smouldering pile of ashes. When the flames were first noticed they were in the upper portion of the building, and spread with such rapidity that it was found impossible to get the fire under control. The building also housed the post office for Whonnock and district, but the mail was rescued, although it was impossible to save any of the other contents of the store.

Keeping the fires up to avoid the freezing of the merchandise in the store may have damaged the pipes. Did the sale of the stove to the Ladies Club have anything to do with it? We don't know. What we know with certainty is that Joe Methot and not Richard Whiting was in charge of the store when it burned. A sale of the property is not reflected in the Municipal records. Methot had perhaps not even been a year in Whonnock when the accident happened.

The Whonnock Store burned down in the early morning hours of 14 March 1916 and a few weeks later the new post office was in operation. We know now the reason why in 1916 a new post office at its present location replaced the one in the store, where it had been for some 30 years.

A local census held by the Municipality of Maple Ridge and completed in 1916 does not show the Methots anymore. Joseph H. Methot and his young son, Ernest, probably left Whonnock shortly after the incident. Did they take their little dog with them? Certainly they were accompanied by some bitter memories. Although it was clear that it was an accident it must have been a traumatic experience for both. They never spoke about it to their family.

This case shows that reconstruction of local history is only possible by some luck and a large amount of

diligent searching for pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Without Clair Methot's phone call back in 1998 we would not have known that his grandfather ever lived in Whonnock. It seems that Vera Rolley (née Showler) was the only one remembering that Joe Methot had the store when it burned. If Daphne Sleigh had not recorded that information it would have been lost. Clair Methot's presence was confirmed by the minute books of the Norwegian Lutheran Women's Association and the minutes of the women who owned and operated the Ladies Hall. The books were lovingly preserved by individuals who assured that they were placed in safe hands. The letters preserved by the Methots confirmed that Methot owned the Whonnock Store and made us doubt the year of 1911 as the date the store burned. Fortunately the event was recorded in *The British Columbian*, providing closure to this quest.

I am glad I found an answer to Clair Methot's question about his grandfather who owned a store in Whonnock.

Fred Braches

#### Notes

Assuming that the store burned in 1911 I wrote in Whonnock Notes No. 5, Brian and other Friends, "Obviously the burning of Mr. Methot's store created a vacuum in Whonnock. A Mr. Methot ran a store in Whonnock around 1915." I assumed incorrectly that he operated what later would be Luno's store. That should be corrected based on this new information.

Not finding any reports on the fire in the newspapers for the war years, I wrote in Whonnock Notes No. 6, Ferguson's Landing: George Godwin's Whonnock (page 9): "[The Whonnock Store] burned down some time after the Great War and long after Godwin left." The store burned not after, but during the First World War, some years after Godwin left.

In the *Hammond, Haney & Coquitlam Weekly Gazette* of 6 July 1922, under heading "Whonnock News" the following: "Mr. Ernest Methot and Miss Charlotte Methot spent the week-end with Mr. and Mrs. Black" and "Mr. John Nelson, Miss Charlotte Methot, Mr. Ernest Methot and Miss Jean Black attended the dance at Haney last Friday."



# Whonnock United Church: 90 Years Old



The history of the Whonnock Presbyterians dates back to the regular services by the Rev. Alexander Dunn in Whonnock in 1888.

In 1914, a Church of Presbyterian faith was built on land donated by John Brodie. Following plans drawn by R.A. Hamilton, contractor/carpenter Olaus Lee constructed the building with volunteer help.

The church was dedicated on Sunday, 12 September 1914, in the presence of the Reverend Dr. Alexander Dunn, Whonnock's first Presbyterian minister.

In 1925 the Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Canada were amalgamated, and Whonnock Presbyterian became Whonnock United Church.

## **The Reverend Alexander Dunn & Whonnock**

The land where Whonnock United Church stands was once owned by Whonnock's first Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Alexander Dunn.

The story of Presbyterianism in Maple Ridge starts with the Reverend Robert Jamieson, who came from Ontario to New Westminster in 1862 and conducted the first Presbyterian service at the McIvor homestead that year.

In 1875, straight from Scotland, the Reverend Alexander Dunn was assigned to carry on the work began by Mr. Jamieson. Mr. Dunn lived in Langley and for a decade he served the settlers on both sides of the Fraser River from Yale to Eburne (Marpole), including Maple Ridge.

Mr. Dunn married Annie Kern from Ontario in 1882. The couple left Langley in the spring of 1886 and, after a few months of "rest and change," in Ontario, Mr. Dunn began a pastorate at Port Alberni. Two years later, in the spring of 1888, the minister and his wife returned to the mainland.

At that time the people at Mount Lehman and Port Haney were completing



their own church building, and each of the two communities would have welcomed the well-respected Mr. Dunn as a resident. He, however, moved to Whonnock although there was no church building there and only a small number of Presbyterians.

Before he left Langley for Port Alberni the Reverend Alexander Dunn had purchased 80 acres of land (the core of Whonnock) from another “Old Kirk” man, Robert Robertson, the first white settler in Whonnock. The coming of the railroad in 1885 and the fact that Whonnock had a station were good reasons to invest in land in Whonnock. Mr Dunn knew Robert Robertson because, from the minister’s arrival in British Columbia the Shetlander had rowed him tirelessly up and down the Fraser between Mission and Eburne and “Robbie” would continue to do so after Whonnock became the centre of Dunn’s pastorate.



*The Reverend Alexander Dunn and Annie (Kern) Dunn. Photo courtesy Donald Waite.*

Radiating out from Whonnock the Reverend Alexander Dunn started serving the settlements on the north shore of the Fraser between Yale and Whonnock as well as Mt. Lehman and Aldergrove. Around 1890 [1892?] his field included St. Andrews in Port Haney. The Reverend and Mrs. Dunn lived in Whonnock until 1905, when the minister retired. By that time they had sold their 80 acres land, reaping the rewards for their confidence in Whonnock’s future. *fb*

### **The Presbyterian Church in Whonnock before 1914**

During the almost 18 years of his stay in Whonnock, the Reverend Alexander Dunn conducted Sunday worship. From an old diary we know that he preached every month in Whonnock and that people from the Stave River area and from across the river joined the Whonnock residents in the small schoolhouse on the edge of the Fraser River to hear Mr. Dunn speak.

The school seems to have been a satisfactory location for the minister as well as his pioneer flock, however, after Mr. Dunn’s retirement in 1905 a wave of new settlers moved to the area and in 1910 a small group of these new residents, dedicated Presbyterians, met at the school “to discuss the local management of the church” in Whonnock. They committed themselves “towards the furtherance of the Gospel in connection with the Presbyterian Church at Whonnock.” The men’s names were: John Brodie, R. Aikman, Hugh Steele, R.A. Hamilton, J.P. Thompson, J.S. Black. Also present was one woman: Mrs. Brodie. A little later, in January 1911, the gentlemen formed a “managers committee,” including James Rolley, the only committee member who had been a long-time Whonnock resident.



*This tablet, attached to a wall in the vestry of the church, was presented by the “Ladies Club” formed in 1911 (not Ladies’ Aid) who built the Ladies Hall, completed in 1912, later known as Whonnock Memorial Hall.*

John Brodie, retired Hudson’s Bay Factor from Manitoba, and his wife Janet were both born in

In the spring of 1912, the sections Whonnock, Ruskin, Albion, and Silverdale were removed from the Haney congregation and the Reverend George Fisher was appointed to the new field. He started giving weekly services to Ruskin and Albion and fortnightly services to Whonnock and Silverdale. However, as the number of newcomers joining the church in Whonnock kept growing, in 1913 Whonnock asked for and was granted a weekly service as well. Added to the roll were the names of Mrs. F. Pullen, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Graham. Capt. and Mrs. E. Reid, Mr. and Mrs. E. Cuthbert, Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Wright, Mr. and Mrs. Duncan Graham.

In 1913 the Ladies' Aid Society of Whonnock Presbyterian Church was formed, with Mrs. Captain Reid, Mrs. Hamilton, Mrs. Cuthbert, and Mrs. Gott at the helm. (Mrs. Gott moved away in the fall of that year.) The society's object was to further the financial and social interests of the church and community. The ladies immediately went to work. A home cooking sale at the newly built Ladies Hall was their first activity followed by a plethora of other money generating projects: sewing (it is amazing how many aprons could be sold in a small community like Whonnock), knitting, musical programs, lantern slide lectures.

Up to this time the school was still being used, for the small fee of 25¢. However, as the number of new members increased the congregation began to think about a proper church building. At an annual "business and social meeting" of January 1914 Mr. Brodie suggested to build a church and a motion directed the "managers" to "take steps towards the erection of a church to cost \$500." The amount was guaranteed by Mr. Brodie and according to him already subscribed.

A few months later the congregation assembled once more, this time to hear that the cost for material and labour for the building of a church seating 100 was estimated at \$800. The women of Ladies' Aid were prepared to borrow and repay the difference up to \$300 to assure that the church would be built. The congregation agreed to borrow the amount, but Mr. Aikman did not want to see the congregation going into debt and resigned as a manager. It proved to be a heavy burden for the congregation; the final cost of the church and its furnishings would be \$1,129.10. But sufficient money was raised, mainly by subscription, and the debt was cleared off by 1918. Special thanks went to Mr. John Brodie, convener of the building committee, and to Ladies' Aid. *fb*

Scotland, but lived most of their lives in Canada. They were clearly the driving force behind the building of the church. They gave their personal guarantees for the financing of the building of the church and donated the land on which the church stands.

John Brodie never lost his interest in the church and its well being. He remained active in the affairs of the church, until he retired as senior elder and superintendent and treasurer for the Sunday School at age eighty. After John Brodie died in 1938 his house became today's Christian Education Building.

### **A brief history since Union in 1925**

Immediately preceding union there were fifty members on the communion roll and some thirty families interested in the work. Our





minister at that time was Rev. Wm. Burton. There were a very active Sunday School and Ladies' Aid.

Following Church Union in June 1925, Rev. C.H. Daly was our minister, the work progressing as before with approximately the same number of communicants. At this time an official board was formed for the government of the charge; that being Haney, Albion, and Whonnock.

In 1927, Rev. P. Henderson took over the pastorate. During the year pews were installed in the church building—a gift of the Ladies' Aid.

By 1929, our membership had decreased to forty-two due to several members moving to other centres. In June 1930 the Rev. T.R. Peacock took over the field. At this time there were forty-five members and about thirty-five families interested in the work. During Mr. Peacock's ministry the field was rearranged, combining Ruskin, Whonnock and Websters Corners. At this time a fund was started for the building of a church hall.

In June 1933, Rev. H.S. Hastings came to us and during his ministry the church hall was completed. In 1935, Mr. John Brodie retired as Sunday School Superintendent, having served in that capacity since 1913.

In June 1936, Rev. F.H. Stevens came to us; this representing another change in the field, it now being Haney, Websters Corners and Whonnock. In June 1937, with the field being again rearranged, we were served from Coquitlam by Rev. W.A. Guy. During this time the church was presented with air organ by Mr. & Mrs. Waters. The organ was first purchased in Canada sent to England and finally returning to Canada and eventually arriving for use in our church.

Again in June 1939, the field was re-arranged and Whonnock attached to Hatzic, Dewdney and Clayburn with Rev. A. Mackay as minister. The membership had dropped to twenty-six at this time, some having moved to other fields and others being removed by death.

In June 1943, Rev. R.W. Hibbert came to the field and the work progressed as usual with twenty-six members and about thirty families interested. During Mr. Hibbert's stay with us, Mr. L.C. Muston retired after some twenty years service as organist.

In June 1947, Rev. Dr. Norah Hughes came to us. This was our first experience as a congregation of a lady minister and it was a very worthwhile experience and one we will long remember.

In June 1949, Rev. W.A. MacIntosh came to us and is our present minister. There are seventeen active members on the roll—some other names are still on but the members are non-resident. About twenty-five families are interested in the work of the church. At present there is no Sunday School.

At a special meeting in June 1933 the congregation agreed to build a church hall adjacent to the church. The work was assigned to a Mr. MacBryer of Whonnock for \$357. This photo from the 1930s shows the hall to the right of the vestry. The extension was made possible by subscriptions and volunteer services.



*The beautiful pews in the United Church were purchased in 1927 by the Ladies' Aid Society from Valley City Seating in Dundas Ontario for an amount of \$349, including freight. "They were shipped to us in the flat with all the equipment for setting them up. Mr. Drewry brought them from the station and undertook to put them together and place them. Mrs. Drewry was the assistant as it required two people" At the following congregation meeting the managers extended a very hearty vote of thanks to the Ladies' Aid "for this most acceptable gift."*

In the course of the twenty-five years, we have lost three elders by death. At present we have two elders. It is interesting to note our senior elder Mr. Robert A. Hamilton was the architect for our church building which was erected in 1914 with voluntary labour under the supervision of a carpenter. There are five or six members of the official board. The present ones have served for some years with only minor changes. We have had thirty-two baptisms in the twenty-five years.

*Compiled by the late Mary (Dewry) Elliot in 1950*

### **Recent past in brief**

In the 1950s the church property entrance was changed and the front grounds were raised. During the 1960s and 1970s carpets were installed and the roof was replaced.

In the 1980s the Education Centre was furnished, carpets and linoleum for the kitchen and bathroom were installed with the aid of a grant from the Old Age Pensioners Association.

In the 1990s the late Reverend Gary Dickson presided over the congregation and when Whonnock United Church celebrated its 80th birthday he was instrumental in obtaining the Heritage Plaque. It was erected on April 17, 1994 in the presence of the Mayor of Maple Ridge, Mr. Carl Durksen, and the community. The dedication, a program of the Heritage Advisory Committee, was a joyous occasion for anyone with connections to this rich community. During the latter part of the decade, several extraordinary ministers built a thriving membership.

Reverend Anna Christie (1998–2001) is best remembered by Art and Soul, brightening young lives with music and theatre.

The Reverend Clayton Arkesteyn-Vogler has been ministering at Whonnock United Church since 2001. At 11:00 AM, every Sunday morning, the congregation begins by sharing their stories of the week, their joys, concerns, introductions and announcements. Words of assurance and prayers for the people are enveloped in hymns that are delivered with cheerful, if not rustic, enthusiasm and praise.

*Cathy Holmes*



*The Brodie house is now the Christian Education Building.*



*Entrance to the Whonnock United Church, 2004. The vestry to the right. The steeple was added in the 1930s.*



# Whonnock and Ruskin Schools Before 1900



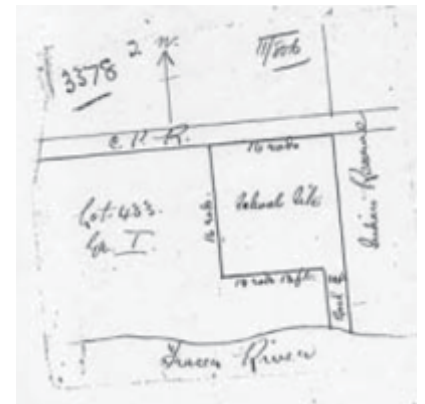
The Whonnock School on the river bank around 1900. Thomas Mercer was the teacher. Top row from right to left: Thomas Hodgson, Geoffry Hodgson, Bessie Henderson, Jenny Boyd, Kate McCarthy, Ella Owen, Gladys Fancher, William Owen. Bottom row from right to left: George Owen, Constance Hodgson, Constance (or Monna?) McCarthy, Pearl Boyd, Ruth Rolley, Maisie Owen. This image was given by Ruth (Rolley) Ferguson to the Maple Ridge Museum and Archives in 1968.

## Maple Ridge's First Schools

Maple Ridge's oldest school dates back to 1875, a year after incorporation. It was located at the south end of Laity Street, in what we call today "The Ridge." Ten years later the school in Whonnock was opened and Haney followed in 1888. The next schools followed in 1895 (Yennadon area), 1896 (Websters Corners), 1897 (Ruskin), and 1899 (Hammond).

## "Whonnock" and "Ruskin"

Early pioneers did not know Whonnock and Ruskin by those names. They would describe the place where they lived as "near (Fort) Langley" or "near the Stave River." Only after 1885, when the new post office and the new railway station were named "Whonnock," did people identify the place where they lived as "Whonnock." The railway station initially showed a different spelling and several pioneers were writing "Warnock" for a few years. The area they called Whonnock covered today's Whonnock, Ruskin, and the Stave Falls area. Also the Glen Valley people across the river, who



This is a copy of a sketch on file in the Land Registry Office in New Westminster of the site of the first Whonnock School accepted there in 1884. From the collection of Brian Byrnes.

received their mail from the Whonnock post office, initially referred to their place as “Whonnock.”

## The Stave River School in Whonnock

In 1883, settler Marcus Cox from Silverdale (Mission) took the first step to get a school for the area around the Stave River by writing a letter to the Superintendent in Victoria. When the new Stave River district was established on 5 June 1884, it became clear that Silverdale was outside its boundaries. Therefore a very disappointed Marcus Cox could not be a school trustee of the new Stave River School and his children could not even attend the Whonnock school. Noble Oliver, Whonnock’s first postmaster and shop keeper, took over where Cox left off. Oliver remained the secretary of the board of trustees for more than ten years.

The first schoolhouse in Whonnock was ready in the summer of 1885. It stood on land between the Fraser and the railway tracks, west of the Whonnock Reserve, and it stayed there for some fifty years. Its official name was Stave River School, but in 1897 this name was given to a new school in Ruskin.

## The Long Way to School

There were only a few families living in the Stave River school district and only children who lived close to the Whonnock school could attend classes on a regular basis. There were no roads to speak of and the winter rains made the tracks impassable. Under the best of circumstances for many children reaching school was a chore: “A number of students have a walk of three miles or over,” reports the first teacher, “and some have to cross the river and that makes [attendance] uncertain.” The annual school reports show an enrolment of between 25 and 36 students, but the average attendance would be at best half of that, depending on the weather and also parents would keep children home if they were needed for work there.

## Growing up without education

The transcontinental railway brought a steady stream of new settlers to Maple Ridge and children everywhere in the district needed schooling. We know from an 1893 letter that there were only three schools in the municipality: Maple Ridge (The Ridge), Port Haney, and “Warnock.” Three miles was the maximum distance child was allowed to travel to the schoolhouse, and many children living beyond three miles were growing up without public education. In the following years, the number of schools

NAME	SURNAME	AGE	REMARKS
Seabert, A.	Thompson	17	Mr Thompson
Walter, J.	Thompson	13	"
Eden, C.	Thompson	11	"
Larson, J.	Thompson	9	"
Lilly	Thompson	7	"
William	Tier	6	Samuel Tier
Harry	Tier	5	"
John	Tier	4	"
George	Tier	3	Samuel Tier
Samuel	Cromarty	13	James Cromarty
James	Oliver	12	Robert Oliver
James M.	Oliver	12	"
Robert M.	Oliver	6	"
Charlotte	Robertson	12	Robert Robertson
Charlotte	Robertson	11	"
John	Robertson	12	"
Young, C.	Robertson	8	"
Henry	Robertson	4	"

461/84

This is a copy of the list of potential pupils mailed by Noble Oliver to the Superintendent of Schools in Victoria in 1884 to convince him that Whonnock needed a school. The children are from the Thompson, Cheer (here written Tier), Cromarty, Oliver, and Robertson families. The original is in the BC Archives in Victoria.



in Maple Ridge grew from three to seven with new schools starting in the Yennadon area (1895), Websters Corners (1896), Ruskin (1897), and Hammond (1899).

### **The Front or North Whonnock—where should the school be moved?**

The children from North Whonnock hardly ever attended school, as the distance from their homes, although within the three-mile limit, was prohibitive. Therefore, when in 1892, Glen Valley, across the Fraser River from Whonnock, got its own schoolhouse, attendance at the school in Whonnock reached an unacceptable low and a new location for the school was considered.

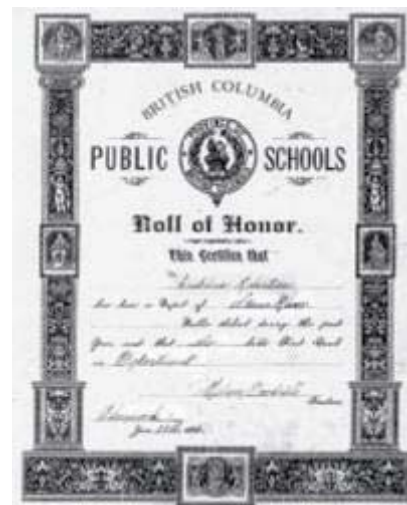
It was proposed to move the schoolhouse to what is now 104th Avenue, halfway between 272nd Street and Whonnock Creek, but even this compromise did not satisfy either the “Front” or the “North.” The parents from North Whonnock had a place ready at the northeast corner of today’s 272nd Street and 112th Avenue, not too far away from where the present Whonnock Elementary would be built more than a century later.

In May of 1884 rapid melting of an unusually high snow pack combined with widespread rainfall in the interior resulted in immense flooding all over the Fraser Valley delta. Fortunately Whonnock, lying on higher ground except for some land on the riverbank south of the rail track, was out of danger and even its little schoolhouse was spared.

However, disaster of a different kind struck the parents from the “Front.” A special school meeting was called in June 1894 to agree on the move to 104th Avenue. The meeting took an unexpected turn when the “North” managed to force and win a vote to rather move the school house to 112th Avenue. Noble Oliver, then secretary of the school board, later asked the Superintendent of Education in Victoria for “compassion” adding “the school is now going to be placed where it will do duty only to a few Norwegian settlers.” Those were the Lee and Nelson families.

In the end all remained the same—the Superintendent did nothing and the schoolhouse stayed where it was between the tracks and the Fraser River. Also, as some new settlers arrived, and several residents, who initially had wished the school to be at 112th Avenue, moved closer to the river, the attendance levels went up again.

In 1897 a new school was built in Ruskin, which was given the name “Stave River School.” From that time the school in Whonnock was officially known as the “Whonnock School.”



Roll of honour of 1886. The text reads: “This certifies that ANDRINA ROBERTSON has been a pupil of STAVE RIVER Public School during the past year and that SHE holds First Rank in DEPARTMENT.” This “Roll of Honor” is signed by Melrose Dockrill, Teacher and is dated “Whonnock, 25 June 1886,” only a year after the school opened.

Andrina, then about 13 years old, is one of the first students of the Stave River School in Whonnock. She was a daughters of Whonnock’s first white settler, Robert Robertson from the Shetlands, and his wife Tselatsetenate from Nicomen Island.

Lyn Ross, descendant of the oldest daughter of Robert Robertson, is the custodian of this and other interesting family documents. For more on our the Robertson family read Whonnock Notes No. 7, “Robert Robertson & Tselatsetenate.”

## **The Stave River school at the Ruskin**

In 1896, the Canadian Co-operative Society (CCS) started lumbering and sawmilling at the Stave River. The number of children of the families attached to the co-operative warranted the establishment of a school at the mouth of the Stave River, where the mill was and where they lived. The new school opened on 1 April 1897 with an enrolment of 30. The government records refer to the new school as "Stave River" until about 1910, when it starts to be listed as "Ruskin."

## **The Rise and fall of the CCS**

The name Ruskin Mills was given to the place at the mouth of the Stave River by the members of the Canadian Co-operative Society (CCS). The society was established in 1893, but it was not until 1896 that they started their colony and their work in Ruskin, probably inspired by the Ruskin Co-operatives in Tennessee. John Ruskin, after whom Ruskin is named, was an English author and critic who encouraged co-operatives.

According to a newspaper report of May 1897, the CCS had 54 members, 35 of whom lived and worked at or around the mills. The same report lists, in addition to a "well-equipped sawmill...with machinery to turn out all kinds of lumber, a boiler house, shingle mill, dry kiln, boarding house, general store, public school, smithy shop, shoemaker's shop, barns, and homes for the members." A post office was added on New Year's Day the following year. An instant community was created overnight with amenities equal to those of Whonnock and with employment right in their midst. In 1898, Henderson's directory acknowledged the birth of a new community called Ruskin by giving it a separate entry. The year before, the residents had been listed as residents of Whonnock.

The co-operative seemed to flourish but an exceptionally rainless summer in 1898 dried the Stave up and logs could not be moved to the plant. The CCS lacked the money to survive the crisis and it folded in 1898. It surrendered its assets to E.H. Heaps & Co. in the spring of 1899. Some of the members continued working in Ruskin and other members moved away. Many became later active in British Columbia's labour movement.

## **Charles Whetham**

Charles Whetham was a justice of the peace and a distinguished school trustee. He was a scholar, who previously had taught at colleges in Ontario and Vancouver. Whetham granted permission to the Canadian Co-

Names and age of first students registered at the Stave River School in Ruskin in 1897

Ball, David 12  
Donnelly, Mamie 11  
Donnelly, Harry 7  
Douglas, Mabel 7  
Douglas, Wallace 9  
Douglas, Thomas 12  
Douglas, Edgar 14  
Downey, Lancelow 6  
Downey, William 5  
Downie, Hannah 14  
Fancher, Gladys 9  
Farmington, Stanley 11  
Martin, Margaret 11  
Martin, Kenric 13  
Meorn, Arthur 14  
Ostrom, Darwin 11  
Smith, Lillian 10  
Watson, Mary 12  
Watson, Lewis 7  
Watson, Allan 11  
Watson, John 9  
Watson, Arthur 5  
West, George 9  
West, Lena 7



operative Society to build a permanent schoolhouse on his land, away from the mill. He took an active part in frequent discussion meetings where Ruskin's philosophy and socialist ideas were explored. It is said that Whetham became the counsellor and friend of all the settlers wise enough to seek his advice.

The young idealists who formed the Canadian Co-operative Society were eager to widen their scope. A Ruskin pioneer, remembering Ruskin School's earliest days, writes: "...this period was, perhaps, the liveliest in the history of the school. The Socialists were keen and aggressive about their experiment, and this spirit carried over to the children at school."

### **Moving away from the noise**

The place used for the first classes at the centre of the industrial activities in Ruskin could only have been a temporary solution. The racket from the sawmill was too much for both teacher and pupils. "It maked the teacher crazed," settler Jim Donatelli later said about it. Some say that the school stayed there for a few years, but recent studies suggest that when classes resumed after the summer recess in 1897 the students would have returned to a rural school on Whetham's land, away from the noise and dust. This was the place where in 1916 the school building was constructed that is still there.

Fred Braches

From the **Archives** No. 1

Wilband, Burns 12

Wilband, Laura 11

Wilband, Jennie 10

Wilband, Bellamy 6

Wilband, Seward 5

Wilbrand, Hesson 8

List courtesy of Ruskin Hall





# WHONNOCK NOTES

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1. Transcripts from the Fraser Valley Record (1908-1912)
2. Cemeteries in Whonnock
3. The Trondheim Congregation
4. Through the Eyes of Brian and other Friends
5. Whonnock 1897 —John Williamson's Diary
6. Ferguson's Landing: George Godwin's Whonnock
7. Robert Robertson and Tselatsetenate
8. A Name Index of the Whonnock Notes Series No. 1-7
9. A Name Index of the Whonnock Community Association
10. The Family of Catherine & Edward Julius Muench
11. It Was a Wonderful Life, Brian and Isabel Byrnes
12. Whonnock's Post Office
13. John Williamson's Diary Revisited
14. The Case of Private Cromarty, a Soldier from Whonnock
15. A Dream Come True
16. The Ladies Club: Minutes 1911-1919
17. Enumeration Maple Ridge 1917
18. Charles Whetham: A Remarkable Resident of Ruskin
19. Short Writings on Local History

Sue Schulze continues to have a stock of all *Whonnock Notes* handy at the Whonnock post office, providing easy access to anyone who would like to buy a copy. We owe her thanks for doing this—and much more—for the promotion of the history and heritage of Whonnock.

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Also available: *Records of the Whonnock Community Association's Historical Project, 1985.*