

MAPLE RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Tales from Sampola Part 3

A Surprise Donation

The year was 1928 and Toivo Aro was visiting Websters Corners from his home in Sointula. A fisherman from Sointula, he was one of the early arrivals from Finland to the defunct commune on Malcolm Island off the north

coast of Vancouver Island. But more than a fisherman, Toivo Aro was an artist. Having already painted a beautiful mural backdrop for the community hall in Sointula, Toivo brought his talents, paints, and a big old sail to Websters Corners. The mural that Toivo Aro painted for the stage backdrop of Sampo Hall depicts the beautiful lakes and farms of the Finnish countryside. His previous works for the hall in Sointula were steeped in Socialist imagery of workers raising up, leaving the factories and returning to the land. This feeling is portrayed more subtly in his work for the Websters Corners mural with an idealistic view of wholesome Finnish countryside and farms. This countryside scene of Kangasala, a town in the Tampere region of Finland, was meant to accompany the many plays and performances happening on the stage of the hall, and for many years it did just that.

Over the years, as the hall fell into disrepair and disuse the mural stayed an ever present example of the original purpose of the hall. It served as a stage backdrop, artistic work, and in its later years as a bulletin board. In the final 2017 photos we had donated to the museum of the hall just a few years before it was demolished, the mural was right there, a stalwart reminder of the buildings history. When the hall was demolished, it was believed that the mural was lost forever to time.

We always had hope that we would one day get the call we received this summer, that the mural was saved and was being offered as a donation to the museum. Museum staff received the mural and took it to the St. Andrews church for a few weeks of restoration and study before it was taken to storage. This mural is one of the most spectacular pieces of local history that the Historical Society has had donated in its long history.



The Sampo Hall Mural as it looked from 1928 to the time the Hall was demolished in 2019.



**Sampo Hall Mural at St Andrews church
being cleaned by museum staff**

While cleaning and preparing the mural for storage we were able to learn a bit about it and our local history. The Sampo Hall Mural is not only a fantastic piece of art on one side, it is a record of the citizens of Webster's Corners on the other. On the reverse of the painting it is signed by the bands, performers, participants, and community members of Webster's Corners from 1928 until the hall was closed in WWII, in other words the golden age of the hall. After the hall reopened from the war, we believe that a wooden backing was added as part of renovations. This backing protected the signatures, names, and charcoal drawings added to the back. Further study will let us trace these

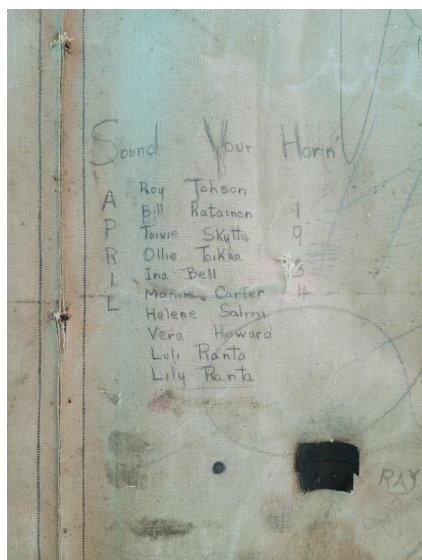
bands and names, and even be able to share many of them with decedents still in the area.

The history of the mural revealed itself as we were removing and cleaning nails, staples, and even bullet holes. We found that the mural itself was painted on a reclaimed sail, likely brought by Toivo Aro with him from Sointula. Being in a prominent position on the stage of the hall it was also subject to use as a bulletin board with staples dated to the mid century. There is also evidence of shotgun damage, and according to a Webster's Corners resident who remembers the event as a child, it was the result of a turkey shoot. With everything we have learned in the brief period we had with the mural out, there will be years of stories and history yet to come.

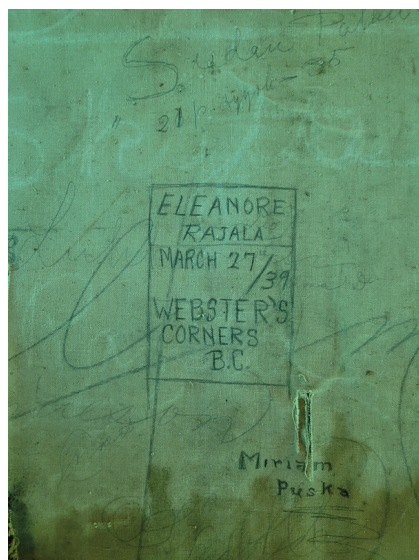
The Sampo Hall mural is now safely cleaned and stored in museum storage and awaiting a day in the future that it can again grace the people of Maple Ridge with its history. Tune in next time for the final chapter of "Tales from Sointula" and follow our Executive Director Shea all the way to Sointula where she learns about our sister community, and mural.



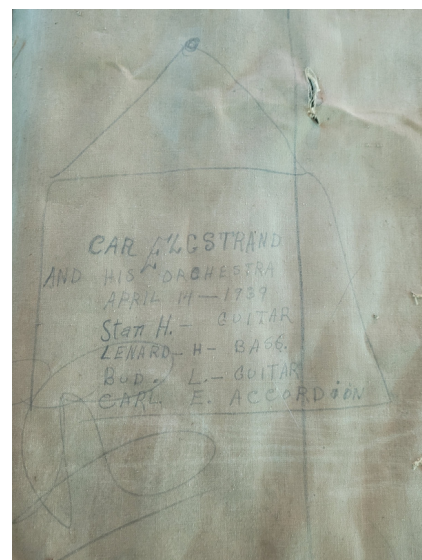
**Detailed view of the mural.
Scenic farmhouse in the
Finnish countryside.**



**Band names signed on back of
mural, band named "Sound
Your Horn"**



**Signed and dated, Eleanore
Rajala March 27, 1939. Shortly
before the hall was closed.**



**Band names and instruments
played "Carl Elgstrand and his
Orchestra, April 14, 1939"**

Heritage Week 2022

February 21 - 27, 2022

Join us in late February to celebrate Heritage Week and Family Day at the Maple Ridge Museum!

Our activity schedule will be finalized in a few weeks time, subject to current health orders. But, you can expect Heritage Walking Tours and some Family Day Fun hosted by the museum.

Also, we will be opening our newly revitalized archival space in honour of this important week of heritage commemoration!

Check the activity schedule online, after February 1st for more details:

<http://mapleridgemuseum.org/heritageweek2022/>

HeritageBC
■■■

**Altogether
Inclusive**

HERITAGE WEEK
2022
February 21-27



Archives Opening

February 27, 2022

The staff at the Maple Ridge Museum and Community Archives have recently undertaken the task of cleaning out and converting the Brickyard Office on the museum site into a fully functioning and accessible community archives space.

Built as the Haney Brick and Tile Company Office in 1935, the building has since worked as office space and storage. After cleaning out and restoring some of the original 1930's interior design features, the space is being equipped with the help of a Maple Ridge Community Foundation Grant. While we are excited to have this space dedicated to the archives, the entire archives does not fit in the this building. Only about 70% of the archives will be available in this new space.

Once the archives opens, community members will be able to come to search the archives, get the help of archives professionals, and interact with the archives themselves. The space will operate by appointment only until COVID restrictions lift and then it will be drop in during open hours.



Museum on the Move

***A preview of our new community outreach program
for summer 2022 & beyond***



photo: staff & volunteers exhibit artifacts and learning materials in the park, outside of the museum, in July 2021.

Space... location... accessibility...

As you know, the Maple Ridge Museum has a number of substantial obstacles to making our programs available to the community. It is a challenge for the museum to run programs and events that can cater to more than a few people at once, and it is equally difficult for many locals to access our buildings.

The solution: Instead of depending on the community to come to the museum, we will be taking the museum into the community !

Premiering this summer, our new *Museum on the Move* program will bring free, accessible, and inclusive museum learning to all corners of Maple Ridge. The goal of this new project is to take the museum's stories and programs to the residents and visitors of our city by setting up a mini "pop-up" museum in locations that are frequented by the public as they go about their usual summer activities. Run by one staff member, but supported heavily by volunteers, *Museum on the Move* will provide an opportunity for experiential learning through interactive activities, visual displays, and face to face encounters with local historians. It is a chance for everyone to become excited about history and want to learn more about the past / present / future of their community. Whether it is a newcomer jogging through a park, locals visiting the Farmers Market, or a family playing at Albion Sports Complex... everyone will have a chance to stumble across the museum's programs, engage, learn, and become excited about their community.

The program will have a soft launch in 2022, with appearances primarily at the Haney Farmers Market and the City's Happenings programs, then expand each year thereafter. Centered around the themes of community, industry, and sustainability, we will also be partnering with many local organizations to collaborate on learning materials, presentations, and engagement opportunities.

Would you like to volunteer for this new adventure? Or, do you have a local business that would like to partner with us on one of the learning themes? If so, please email mrmeventplanner@gmail.com with 'MOTM engagement' in the subject line.

Membership Renewals

There is still time to support the museum through our membership program!

Last year was a busy year for the museum. With new programming and exhibits, such as *Hands Up: The Billy Miner* experience and *The Bee's Knees: Dressing up in 1920s Maple Ridge at the ACT Art Gallery*, the museum has been able to reach new audiences and further our reach in the community.

This year we hope to capitalize on the momentum of 2021 with new and exciting projects including *Museum on the Move* and the opening of a public Archives space. We are so excited for the upcoming year and if you are too, consider showing your support through our membership program. Proceeds from this program help to make our events, programming, and exhibits possible. If that's not enough, with membership you also receive benefits such as discounts, early-bird tickets and full voting rights at our annual general meeting and so much more. As always memberships can be renewed by filling out the Membership Renewal Form under the memberships tab on our website, or by mail.



Haney House Reopening Postponed

Due to changing PHOs Haney House will remain closed

Although staff remain hopeful that Haney House will be open to the public soon, for the time being our lovely heritage house museum will remain closed. Since our reopening announcement in November 2021, the pandemic has once again thrown a curveball with the Omicron variant. With new, more restrictive PHOs (Provincial Health Orders) being reinstated, the opening will be delayed. Make sure to check our social media for updates on Haney House. Staff will reassess at the end of January when PHOs are updated.

DEWDNEY-ALOUETTE



DARS train days are cancelled for the foreseeable future due to the pandemic.

Visit the Dewdney-Alouette Railway Society's diorama in the museum. On the last Sunday of every month, members of the Dewdney-Alouette Railway Society would host visitors to "talk trains" and operate the Diorama. Model Railroaders are welcome on the Tuesday and Thursday evenings before the last Sunday of the month.

Info: Dick Sutcliffe at 604-467-4301 or

E-Mail: ras1@uniserve.com

Published and printed by the Maple Ridge Historical Society

22520 116th Ave. Maple Ridge BC V2X 0S4 | Phone: 604 463 5311

E-mail: mrmuseum@gmail.com | <http://www.mapleridgemuseum.org>

A digital version of this and previous newsletters can be found on the Web site under the tab "About Us"