



MAPLE RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter October 2010



Mennonite women at a Vancouver boarding house – March 1956. Photo supplied by S. Borger.

SANDRA BORGER – OCTOBER 28

EVEN THOUGH they were the most unlikely of candidates, young, unmarried Mennonite women were able to provide for the economic survival of their families during the Great Depression. After the Mennonites escaped persecution in Russia during the Russian Revolution, they incurred large debts when travelling to and settling in Canada.

Initially settling on the Prairies, the devastating conditions of the Depression and the promise of economically-viable berry farming in the Fraser Valley spurred an influx of Mennonites into British Columbia. Even so, paying off their debts remained a challenge for many families. One avenue that was open to them was to send the young, unmarried women of their patriarchal, rural community into the city of Vancouver for domestic work.

Sandra's presentation is based on her research for her Master's thesis and will give an overview of the working lives, relationships with employers, and connections to the Fraser Valley Mennonite community that allowed these young women to survive and thrive.

The meeting is at 7:30pm on Thursday, October 28, in our usual meeting place at St. Andrew's Heritage Hall at 22279 116th Ave., just west of the Haney Bypass. *vp*

DONALD E. WAITE – NOVEMBER 25

DON WAITE will regale us with harrowing tales of wrestling Vancouver's stories out of their various hiding places for his latest book: *Vancouver: A History in Photographs*. Don has done a magnificent job of finding and restoring images of Vancouver history that have not been seen before. The book is a real gem. *vp*



DON MERKLEY

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY has lost another good friend and staunch supporter with the passing of **Don Merkley** at the age of 90 on Sept 30, 2010. Many will remember him as a cheerful and lively fellow who brought treasures from his vast collection to our member's meetings and raffled them off after sharing their stories with us.

Don was born in Haney and spent his life on the family farm – most of which is now Merkley Park – just east of the MRSS school grounds. Intelligent and curious, Don finished high school but the family lacked the funds to send him on to university. He trained as a pattern maker and was a life-long learner and inventor of strange and wonderful devices.

Perhaps the item that speaks most clearly about its owner is Don's cannon. Very few people have their own personal cannon, but Don built the one pictured here when it was used as the starting gun for the opening of the Trans-Canada Trail. Don was the sort of guy of whom you would say, "Of course he has a cannon".



Don's love and enthusiasm for history were also life-long. A terrific story-teller, he took the time to write out his memories of his childhood in Haney. He even made a series of Christmas cards – each one depicting a different memory of a childhood Christmas. He was a constant visitor to the museum, noted for bringing us one item at a time so he could have a visit and tell us its story. We often joked that we should just write a number on him and put him in a display case.

It is with heavy hearts that we say goodbye to this special friend and we extend our condolences to his sons Grant and Blake. *vp*

WORK AT THE BRICKYARD OFFICE

IF YOU DRIVE past the museum you'll see a parking lot full of big trucks. The drainage around the brickyard office building has always been poor and with chronic leaks on the east wall, the municipality is addressing the problem before the wet winter weather sets in. It's a big job and will likely take a month at least. We still have access to the building but it is limited and muddy!

TRANSFORMATION TALES

MAPLE RIDGE ART GALLERY is currently hosting a display of Northwest Coast First Nations art. In our first collaboration with new gallery director **Barbara Duncan**, baskets from the **Brian and Isabel Byrnes** collection are included to add a taste of the old to more recent art. We intend to participate in other exhibits with the gallery as we have many collections worthy of appreciation that spend far too much time in storage.



Be sure to visit the gallery, located on the main floor of the ACT, and see the display between now and November 13. The gallery is open 11am to 4pm, Tuesday to Saturday.



Kids at a sports day at Mount Crescent in 1955

SCHOOL CLOSURES

IT IS ALWAYS DIFFICULT for a community to lose a school. This year, both Mount Crescent and Riverside Elementary Schools have closed. Through contacts with parent groups and teaching staff at both schools, we have been able to obtain large collections of photos and other memorabilia. Despite Mount Crescent having been open for 58 years, most of the assembled materials are from the last 20 or so. Before these schools fade into memory, we are hoping that people will come forward with memories of earlier days so that they are not lost. We have no class photos from 1952 to 1964 or any other memorabilia for that period. *vp*



The Kershaw family farm in the 1920s.

“DINGO DEL”

MOST ADULTS have fond memories of the childhood game, “Chinese Whispers,” where a story is whispered into one ear and then passed along to see what it has become by time it has crossed the room.

The museum had a request this summer for information on a fellow named Dingo Del. He was described to the inquirer, by a person who used to live in the Alexander Robinson area, as a reclusive Asian person who had lived and farmed at the north end of 240th Street. The real story is quite different.

At the north end of 240th, there was a family named **Kershaw** who had a big poultry farm plus they grew sweet peas and other flowers for the florist market. They named their place, "Dingle Dell," in the English fashion common to areas with no addresses.

Sadly, **Dorothy Kershaw Desjardins**, who grew up there, a long-time member and contributor to the historical society, passed away a few months ago. She'd have gotten a good laugh out of "Dingo Del." *vp*

ST. ANDREW'S | RENTAL



The St. Andrew's Heritage Church (1888) now functions as a community hall and is available to rent for weddings, social events, and meetings. The hall accommodates up to 75 people. Call Tom Little at 778-242-7261



Maple Ridge Park, near Haney, B.C.

PICTURING OUR PARKS

IN KEEPING WITH the theme of Heritage Week 2011 - "A Century of Conservation" - a theme selected to honour the centennial of B.C. Parks, the Maple Ridge Museum alongside the Pitt Meadows Museum are running a photography contest aimed at documenting the two community's local parks as they are today and as they were in years past. We are hoping to collect some great pictures from our modern parks and and archival photos showing how our parks have changed over the years.

The contest is open to residents of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows with categories for adults and youth (16 and under). We look forward to your photo submissions! For more details, see our Web site at www.mapleridgemuseum.org or call the museum and speak to Allison at 604-463-5311.

The contest ends February 1 so there is plenty of time to take advantage of fall colour! *aw*



THE LITTLE BUILDING on the Port Haney wharf that was once the wharfinger's office is being reviewed. It costs rather a lot of money in upkeep with little to no return. We are looking for ideas and direction from society members as to its fate.

It was restored in the very early 1990s by a combination of historical society and Heritage Advisory Committee members and was moved onto the wharf. It has never found a function and is a frequent target for graffiti and other vandalism. We have looked into moving it and the cost is prohibitive.

If you have feelings on the matter or an idea for its use, please contact the museum at 604-463-5311 or mrmuseum@gmail.com.

DEWDNEY-ALOUETTE



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 are present 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

