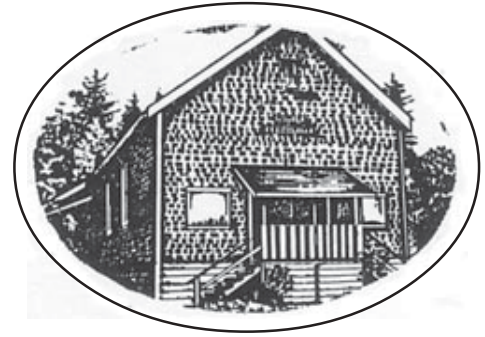


From the Archives

No 2



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The Halls of Ruskin

by Charles A. Miller, April 19, 1975

Consideration should be given to the fact that the existing community hall opposite the Ruskin school was not the first or only hall to serve the needs of the people of the district.

Heaps's Ballroom

The first such hall was a magnificent ballroom on the fourth floor of the hotel, store, post office, restaurant and basement, owned and operated by C.H. Heaps and Company, located on the south side of the C.P.R. track at the mouth of the Stave River on the Fraser River.

Although this was, in its entirety, a private enterprise, all early conventions, business rallies, political gatherings, balls, (as they were known in those days,) down to the ladies of the district tea parties, were held there and although privately owned, not one soul in the community was ever left out. Valley talent was always considered for the orchestra, with the top violinist the late Alonzo Baker, a river boat captain of Albion. These facilities were used until the early part of the year 1916, over a period of some eleven years.

The Hall at Stoltze's

During the latter part of the year 1913, Stoltze Manufacturing Company moved into the Stave Valley to build a large shingle mill and town-site, on the west bank of the river, which in late years supported a "drive-in" theatre and is now the site of a huge trailer court complex.

In the spring of the year, 1916, Mr. Henry Stoltze, owner of the mill and his associates decided to build a community hall for the benefit of the people of Ruskin, under the superintendence of Mr. A.G. Miller, this writer's father, and early May of that year saw its completion, with a Saturday evening opening with everyone welcome for the dancing, to be followed by

a sumptuous table supper at eleven o'clock PM, as all such activities of like nature were frowned upon if they intruded in any way on the forthcoming Sabbath day.

The hall had been gaily decorated with paper lanterns and streamers interspersed with a profusion of early spring cultivated and wild flowers. A spacious lean-to, the full width of the hall had been set up with rough trestle tables and benches and the ladies of the town-site nearby had prepared a sumptuous hot supper and a formal announcement declared supper was ready.

The evening had been festive in all ways, including the prevalence of large quantities of alcoholic refreshments, of which most attendants had partaken of freely, many of whom, by supper time were showing the effects of such imbibing and before supper was over, shouting and cries of "fire, fire, fire," were heard from without, with everyone crowding outside to see one of the houses within the mill town-site burning fiercely. Hose lines were immediately manned and the water from these trained on the burning building. Then the cry arose as to where the owner of the house might be, but nowhere without could he be seen, and his wife, now in hysterics, declared they had been in the house prior to supper time and she had not seen him since.



"There was a magnificent ballroom on the fourth floor of the hotel, store, post office, restaurant and basement, owned and operated by C.H. Heaps and Company." Courtesy Maple Ridge Community Archives.

Although the house was flaming fiercely one of the Japanese mill workers offered voluntarily to try and get within to see if the owner was indeed there. He was swathed in blankets, soaked with the hose water and made two extraordinary attempts to get inside but on each occasion, was repulsed by the heat and flames. The fire took a goodly time to subdue and it was then discovered that the owner had indeed been within and had perished in the conflagration.

This was the first and only event held in this hall. It remained standing until the fall of the year and the children of the community were allowed to use it for roller skating and other activities. Before the year was out, material was needed for more construction in the village and mill area, and it was dismantled piecemeal for these purposes.

First Ruskin Community Hall

During the summer of the year 1916, the two room school at Ruskin was completed with classes in both rooms commencing during the fall semester. This is the same school, with whatever additions and renovations that have been made over the years until this present date.

The old school, in good repair, to the East and further back, was now disused and it was not too long before consideration was given to the thought of using it as a small community hall and meeting place for the now increasing population. Privilege was given by the school board to hold a meeting in the new school, with a very good attendance of recognized citizens and a Committee was formed, and instructed to contact Victoria, B.C. to find out if it might be purchased, moved from the school property, and re-established as a community hall for the surrounding district.

Three responsible and well known men formed the first committee and were, namely Alex and George Gilchrist and Charles Stuart. Within short weeks, confirmation was received from Victoria, and for the sum of one dollar, and the proviso that it would be moved from the school property entirely, it became the beginning of the third hall in the district.

Property now had to be obtained and it was through the gen-



During the summer of the year 1916, the two room school at Ruskin was completed with classes in both rooms commencing during the fall semester.

erous and magnanimous effort of the whole Gilchrist family who owned the property immediately across the road from the school, in donating and deeding a portion large enough for any future needs for such an enterprise.¹

Activities now began in earnest and without fear of contradiction, everyone who was a resident, man and women both, did at sometime give of their efforts and effects and before the year was out the old school was moved to the proposed site.

Deference and consideration must be given, at this time, in naming those who helped in the culmination and fulfilling of a lone, sought after dream, and if any are omitted it is only because this writer, through the mists of time, may have forgotten some of them and may be excused for this oversight.

Motive power in those days consisted of mostly behemoth steam engines and horses. Horses, in this case, magnificent teams, were used exclusively, and those owned by Gilchrist brothers, Isaac Parker and sons, Leander, (Tom) and Harry, Charlie Nelson and Martin Kusha, under the foremanship of Moses Ball. L. O. "Dick" Day, and Albert Miller as riggers, made short work of the job, whilst others in the names of John Speller, James Davidson, John Milne, Charles Stuart, George Langford, Thomas Stewart, R. Dillman, and others including E. T. Parker of Stave River contributed to the labour force, whilst the women of the district saw to hot soup, tea, coffee and food being provided on the weekends that were worked.

During the clearing of the site, several uniform sized logs were saved from the trees that were fallen and dragged to the site of the old school. Stumps were blasted, the resulting holes levelled whilst all bush and debris was systematically and cleanly burnt. Then the building was lifted with screw jacks and when the necessary height was reached, six inch by six inch by thirty foot timbers were placed on top of the round logs now in place under the building and when lowered upon this wooden mat, blocks and cables were attached to anchor holds, the free ends of the cables now hooked to the double trees of two teams, then slowly and carefully the building began its journey to the new foundation of its new location. Whilst such was going on, the labour force with another horse team carefully set more round logs in place and in front of the others, these at a slight angle off square and in so doing in this manner, the building was slowly rotated and by the time it reached its destination, it had been completely turned around. More logs had been peeled, greased, then set at right angles to the building, then with the rigging judiciously set it took but a few minutes to have it pulled into place and now a simple matter to jack it up, remove the logs and gently lower it into place on the already prepared and levelled cement foundations.

There was a period of gratified jubilation when this was completed, for with time out for lunch in the new school base-

¹ The actual transfer of title did not happen till around 1930, when the Ruskin Community Hall Association was incorporated to assume ownership of the land. The donor of the land, William Gilchrist Laing was one of the founders of the Association. As a carpenter Mr. Laing dedicated his free hours to the construction of the present hall. In a letter written in 1927 a resident acknowledged that "...but for Mr. Laing and his [Gilchrist] family we should probably have no public hall at all...."fb

ment, the whole operation was successfully concluded on this one Saturday.

Now the task of renovating the whole building had to be contemplated and as the year progressed, two bachelor carpenters, Mr. William Icing and Mr. Frederick Gray took this task upon themselves each and every day that they were not gainfully employed elsewhere. Whilst doing this work, they were helped with the heavier construction work by another bachelor resident, John Speller, already mentioned in this article. Appeals went out for lumber, hardware and brick, the response was fabulous, with the firms of F.H. Heaps and Company, Stoltze Manufacturing Company and Abernethy and Lougheed, together with many small but numerous cash contributions sending or bringing what they could whilst construction was being carried on and progressed apace.

New skirting from the base line of the old building to the new ground line was put in place, thereby excluding all cold air from the floor, with all the positioning of three ventilators to keep this area aired out and the highest side used for storage. The existing cloakroom partition, together with the raised teacher's dais were removed and refloored with edge grain fir flooring, in all, making one room of approximately 900 square feet.

Enough and more, good dimension shiplap lumber had been delivered from the two milling concerns, together with an ample number of first grade shingles from the shingle mill, that it was now considered possible to construct an annex consisting of a full width stage, complete with a two roomed dressing room on the west side and a similar sized kitchen complete with wood burning cook stove on the Eastern side.

This work was carefully and completely carried out, then with the necessary chimneys for the kitchen and another for a large upright heater in the front of the building, together with the necessary approach stairs, a good-sized slatted woodshed and a spacious double sized privy, complete with a huge slaked lime barrel for each side, the new hall was now in readiness for any event that might be considered, and at this time it would be only appropriate to thank those old timers.

By the time that all this work had been concluded the year was drawing to an end and it was now decided the first full public gathering should be a Christmas concert and to this end Mrs. Frank D. Pelkey, wife of the C.P.R. station agent took upon herself the task of coaching, teaching and preparing the youngsters of the district for such an entertainment. In this she was a very able person together with also being a flawless pianist and with the help of the junior room teacher of the new school across the road, Miss Jean Fraser, rehearsal commenced for an hour after school each day, with the exception of Saturday and Sundays, until the evening of its much advertised, (by word of mouth mostly) gala opening.

Consideration had been given to the fact that this formal opening of the new hall might be so well attended that special efforts were taken in looking after the seating requirements and a call went out for extra chairs which were loaned by many district residents, whilst the two carpenters concluded their efforts in making a number of wooden benches to accommo-

date visitors on the two sides of the building.

Refreshments in the form of sandwiches, cakes, cookies, tea and coffee were generously prepared by the local ladies and the tables in the kitchen literally creaked with the abundance of such goods, whilst some of the men brought in a large fir Christmas tree which was set in place on the west side of the hall front near the stage. It was decorated by the older teenage pupils together with holly and assorted natural greenery tied with crimson ribbon, adorning the side windows and over the double front entrance doors.

It had been decided to have this formal opening on the Saturday evening preceding Christmas day, and by the opening time of 7:45 PM arrived, there was not even standing room left within the main floor area and many visitors were standing in the wings of kitchen and dressing room areas.

Try and visualize this setting of nearly fifty-nine years ago, together with the fact that electric lights had not been as yet installed in the building and the illumination consisted of reflector type coal oil lights, ten in all in the main hall, whilst the candles on the tree and in the footlights box, fronting the stage, together with four more hanging coal oil lights at the back provided all the illumination. Promptly on the time proposed, Mrs. Pelkey, with a fortissimo chord from the piano announced the appearance of the chairman for the evening, one of the oldest settlers and dearly loved citizen of the district, Mr. Moses Ball, who lived on the hill immediately above the new hall and who had been one of the most ardent workers on the entire project and who had been a former path master, poll tax collector and councillor for the district of Maple Ridge, in a few homely well chosen words declared the new Ruskin peoples' hall formally opened and for all to enjoy themselves.

Mr. F. D. Pelkey now took over as M.C. and very ably took the audience through a short three part play, numerous recitations and group singsong by the pupils and children of the district, each event receiving a heartwarming ovation of applause for each event, whilst the concluding number of, "The Night Before Christmas", by the whole cast received a double encore.

During the whole performance Mrs. Pelkey had been the accompanist to all the songs and it would be only considerate to note that the piano, a small boudoir, "Bell" upright of magnificent tone, had been donated to the hall by a district settler.

Immediately upon completion of the concert, Santa Claus, in the person of Mr. George Gilchrist, together with several helpers took over the task of dispensing the host of presents from and around the large tree and within a very short time, the floor area of the whole building was a shambles of discarded candy and present wrappers.

Food in generous proportions now made its appearance dispensed from various baskets for sandwiches and cheese box tops for the cakes and cookies, whilst tea and coffee was poured in cups on the front of the stage and passed hand to hand to all the seated visitors who were now enjoying a good get together chat on local happenings.

By this time, fine snow was commencing to fall with the outside temperature falling rapidly and within a short time the

hall was cleared up, dishes washed, dried and stored, parcels and carriers, collected by their owners and the people started their return to the various homes in the area. Most had less than a mile to go; horse drawn vehicles could be counted on one hand and automobiles were unknown; the furthest visitors had a walk of over four miles before they reached their home to the north.

From its inception this little community hall became an inspiration for all and every social, political and holiday event held in the district, together in the advantage of having the school playground immediately adjacent and each forthcoming first of July and the end of the first half of the yearly school session in June saw the events held nearby and if the weather was inclement, ice cream and goodies were within the shelter of the building.

Throughout the next few years, Mrs. Pelkey took upon herself, further duties, gratis to the community, in the form of both modern and ballroom dancing, in which again, she proved to be a most adept teacher, with her pupils learning the intricacies of the movements and steps of, "The Lancers", "Roger de Coverley", "French Minuet", "Polka", "Circassian Waltz, and the more modern steps of one, two and three steps, fox trots and waltzes. With her music together with the instructions of another resident, "Jake" Lehman, the rudiments of square dancing, together with Scotch schottisches were learned and enjoyed on nearly every afternoon throughout the year. Together with all this, Mrs. Pelkey also undertook to teach singing to any with such talent, the outcome being much juvenile talent shown in concerts over the succeeding years.

Season's Christmas festivities of the annual concert and tree now saw the advent of Japanese children taking part, with their proud parents in the audience, the first to be D. Fujita and family, the first Japanese people to purchase land in the district.

During these activities, the large woodshed was kept filled with dry wood cut by John Speller from his large acreage of timber and hauled by Gilchrist Brothers horses.

The residents of nearby Stoltze Mill, with their children, also took part in all events, and being salaried people, were most instrumental in monetary needs and always contributed generously on all occasions,

Daring the use of the first old schoolhouse hall it would be appropriate to record two most outstanding concerts put on by local residents and their children, whose ages would range from early entry at age six to public school, until their entering high school.

The first such evening event was highlighted by the Japanese residents with their numerous children putting on a beautiful play with authentic Japanese flowing silk costumes, the dialogue conducted entirely in the Japanese language and interpreted to the white audience by young Lanny Fujita. It was received with ovation and enthusiasm by the elders of the assembled community but it must be recorded that the younger teenage set did some desultory ridiculing. However, let it be recorded that it was so well received that it was repeated on two succeeding concerts, which were so well advertised by word of mouth, that standing room in the little hall was at a

premium from visitors from outside the boundaries of the Ruskin community!

The Salish Indian children of the community had always attended both the old and the new schools, with the respective teachers seeing that some of them always took part in the annual Christmas concerts. Harry Cheer's family resided about half way between the Ruskin trailer court and the village on Wilson Road at Ruskin Dam.

The family were all musical, the father being a talented coronet player, having been instructed by the fathers of the OMI Church at Mission. The children were all self taught and one of the girls, Clara, had a magnificent contralto voice, her sister Lena, a good accompanying voice, while two of the boys, Ray and Clarence, were talented accordion and banjo players. Once their natural shyness and reticent was overcome, that their teacher could induce them to take part in the concerts, they gradually responded to take part in some of the most well received musicals ever held in the little Ruskin hall.

From its first occupancy, the little schoolhouse hall was the centre of all happenings in the surrounding vicinity and the years it was in use saw Sunday School and Church services conducted there and the former Mrs. Pelkey did the teaching together with the leading and singing of all the old and favourite hymns.

Bake sales, teas and parties for various events to raise monies, together with meetings of the Ruskin Whonnock Women's Institute, meetings of the organized co-op Farmers Union of small fruit growers and municipal as well as political meetings also took place within its walls, as well as the plays and concerts already mentioned and a few Friday night dances each year. During these gatherings, it may-be recorded that unless sickness prevented their attendance, all local residents were there, not only for what was going on at the moment but to meet and chat with neighbours and friends.

The area surrounding the little hall had never been cleared very far away from its perimeter walls and the predominant growth was small coniferous firs and cedars with a thick mat of Salal berry on all sides but the roadside entrance. Summer was upon the valley with extremely hot weather and in July of the year 1922, fire totally destroyed the building and contents, including a magnificent full toned Bell piano. School, across the road, was out, the people in the nearest house some two hundred feet away were visiting and it was only when a local resident, taking cream to the morning Aggasiz local train, discovered the hall still smouldering and a goodly brush fire in progress. The alarm was given, a crew mustered, the fire subdued before that day was out. To this day it has never been established whether the loss was incurred from fire starting outside near the area, or from faulty wiring, or an electrical short circuit from within. Insurance was nil; the loss to the community was total and complete. Everything had been consumed except the bricks in the chimney!

Second Ruskin Community Hall

Within but a day or two after the conflagration, a meeting was held in the home of one of the residents, to establish a course of action to rebuild. The response was spontaneous and impulsive with most of the men folk in attendance. A course of action was implemented within a short time, the outcome, to rebuild immediately, if material and funds could be obtained. Mr. George Gilchrist offered to canvass the district for pledges of funds and material for the now proposed new building and Albert Miller, the writer's father, began drawing the plans, estimating and taking off quantities of necessary lumber and material needed, whilst others started immediately to clean up the site of the fire and greatly clear and enlarge the area for the proposed building. It must be remembered that this was the middle of the summer when practically all were working, either on their own holdings, fishing the Fraser River or at the mills and logging camps in the general vicinity, and it was late fall before full-time building actually commenced. However, the word went out as to what had occurred and what was premeditated, whilst Mr. Gilchrist visited the owners of the Mills in the district on foot and at the same time asking for cash and donations from any and all who could financially contribute. The response was fantastic, with pledges for all lumber, shingles, cement and hardware being received at once, all gratis, with the exception of the last item which was delivered at cost price by Cunningham Trapp Hardware of New Westminster and the lumber was donated by and from the huge Abernethy and Loughheed Logging and milling company whilst the nearby firm of the Stoltze Manufacturing Company donated the roof and wall shingles.

It is commendable to note at this time, that this was the second time that both the above named companies had donated their lumber and shingles gratis to, first the little schoolhouse hall and now for the building of a second and much larger building, both within a period of eight years.

It would be in order, at this time, to give the dimensions of the existing hall and also the amount of material necessary to construct such a building. Outside measurements are 30 feet by 80 feet and encloses entrance area with ladies and gentlemen's cloak rooms on either side, main floor, stage and dressing rooms, a small kitchen annex, full width balcony over entrance and a furnace heating area located about midway under the main floor. To itemize all lumber used would not mean very much and would make very dry reading but the main floor at today's prices would cost over two thousand dollars for sub floor of three quarter inch plywood covered with finished edge grain fir or hemlock flooring! The one piece of full length lumber which forms the arch over the stage would cost fifty or more collars today. So the next time you may visit the premises, look closely at the beautiful "Vee" joint lumber that was donated for walls and ceiling, together with all the heavier framing lumber used in the main construction and if you are mathematical minded and know how to figure lumber dimensions at today's prices you would find them astronomical.

Much of the lumber was delivered to the wharf at Ruskin by S.S. *Skeena*, and the same men who had helped with their horse



teams in the moving and building of the former hall now hauled the lumber up the steep hill to the site. There were but few heavy trucks in use at that time but some of the heavier and longer timbers were brought to the site in this manner.

The work progressed with every available resident doing what they could during the longer summer evenings, Sundays and any day they were not at their regular work. So it progressed, with good cement piers cast in place to carry the foundation timbers and before the winter set in, the frame was up and the roof on.

Here again, the yeoman efforts of the two carpenters, Messrs. Laing and Gray with much labour help from George Bartlett and others concluded the interior finishing. New residents who had arrived after world war one, the Lee family who had taken up property on what was then Parker Road, gave many days to the project and John often said how much he learned at this time about dedicated community efforts.

The winter of 1922-1923 saw much seasonal work closed down and it was during this time that most of the work was concluded because more of the local people could help. During this time the walls were shingled, a number of demountable tables, (made to take down when not in use, to be piled, thus taking less space) and Mr. Percy Peterson of Stave Gardens constructed the chimneys for furnace and kitchen. Electrical wiring was done gratis by Messrs. Kamb of Stave Falls, Cameron of Mission and Phelan of Haney.

Cash donations were received from various north shore communities who put on benefit dances to help, with generous subscriptions from Dewdney, Hatzic, Mission, Stave Falls, Whonnock and others, which in its entirety was the backbone of cash necessities.

Work had now proceeded to final completion in the young of the year 1923, a woman's committee was formed and plans finalized for the opening. The valley was a riot of spring blooms and flowers with every resident having such a garden. Huge bouquets graced the wall areas of main floor and stage with varied coloured lilac predominating, interspersed with wild currant and dogwood blooms, whilst the tables, covered with prized snow white linen table cloths, loaned by every available

The first community hall burned down in July or August of 1922 and the new hall neared completion in the May of 1923. (Weekly Gazette 3 August 1922 and 17 May 1923). The community probably started using the new hall in the spring of 1923. The official opening of the hall took place in the fall of 1924 according to the following cutting from The Daily Province, Vancouver, British Columbia. Thursday October 16, 1924.

**ALL WORK FOR
RUSKIN HALL**

**Carpenters, Electricians and
Laborers Work Free On
Community Building.**

400 AT OPENING

RUSKIN, Oct. 16.—More than four hundred attended the opening of the new Community Hall at Ruskin, visitors coming from all over the country between Hammond and Mission. Mr. H. S. Lougheed officially opened the new building. Reeve J. A. McIver also making a short congratulatory speech. Reeve McIver and Councillors Best, Hols and Owen represented the Municipal Council of Maple Ridge.

The new community hall is a splendid example of the fine community spirit so evident in many parts of the Fraser Valley at present. The building starts its career entirely free of debt, \$273 clear profit having been realized at the opening dance. It is 100 feet in length, and the dancing floor is thirty feet by sixty feet. There is a stage forty-four feet by sixteen feet, a fine kitchen at the back of the building, and two dressing rooms in front, with a balcony over the dressing rooms.

CAKES RAFFLED.

Notable among contributions was the donation of two wedding cakes by George Gilchrist, who made them himself. These cakes were raffled for \$100 apiece at Stave Falls and Ruskin. The shingles were donated. The wiring was done free by C. G. Kump, while Fred Gray worked 150 days as carpenter free of charge, and George, Alexander and Dan Gilchrist, together with George Laing, worked sixty days each on the building. A number gave from six to fifteen days of their time. The chairs were donated.

George Gilchrist is the president of the hall committee; F. D. Pelgy, secretary, and Fred Gray and Thomas Stewart the executive.

The hall is beautifully finished both within and without. A sale of work and two dances staged at Whonnock, materially helped to put the hall funds in the enviable shape in which they stand.

housewife in the community, were enhanced by vases of tulips and other spring blooms.

Invitations had been sent to dignitaries throughout the lower mainland and when all were seated at the head tables on the stage, together with every seat filled on the main floor. The benediction was given by the minister of the Anglican Church at Whonnock, a short welcoming speech from Alex Gilchrist and supper began immediately thereafter. Upon completion and when all were seated, Mr. Gilchrist introduced the head table guests, the first being the then mayor of the district of Maple Ridge. Next was Mr. Chas. E. Tisdale, former mayor of the city of Vancouver and who for years had had a summer home at Whonnock; then Nelson Lougheed of the Abernethy-Lougheed timber empire, then Mr. Henry Stoltze of the nearby Stoltze Manufacturing Company.

So the names were called, no one was left out and it included the man who drew the plans, the two carpenters, the bricklayer, and each man and woman who had worked so long and arduously to complete such a worth while project.

By this time the orchestra, a new one to most in the valley, known as the Edna Haywood Players and owned and conducted by her, had arrived and this was the signal for the younger unmarried men to quickly start dismantling the tables which had been cleared by the young ladies, whilst the elders moved to benches and chairs along the ends and sides of the now newly waxed dance floor. Within minutes the band played the opening waltz with everyone taking the floor who wished to take part in this first dance in the new hall. The leading attraction of this orchestra was the playing of a xylophone by the lady owner, something few if any had ever heard before, and it was long after midnight; with an extra collection fee taken up for overtime before the music stopped, and a tired but happy gathering left for their various homes, with many with sore feet, seeking rides with neighbours lucky enough to own cars.

From that memorable opening until this present day this building has seen and entertained so much activity and entertainment that if it were all recorded and itemized the files would be enormous and would have to have a goodly sized area to accommodate their keeping. Much has been forgotten and many who took part in these earlier activities are no longer with us for now, at this date, in late spring of the year 1975 this building has been in constant use for fifty-two years—no wonder some have forgotten!

Various committees have been organized for the keeping and welfare of the building and all who were elected to such office have taken upon themselves the care and consideration of the upkeep of such an establishment and the general appearance of the building at this present day will show how well it was cared for.

Dorm through the years it has been an indoor haven during the winter months for athletic activities, such as badminton and basketball and produced some outstanding players, together, in the earlier days, of a modified type of indoor tennis in which the late Mabel Nelson was very, very seldom out-classed!



The Nokai hall in Ruskin, ca. 1931. Courtesy BC Archives.

Many, many wedding receptions have been held within its walls, together with innumerable “do’s” to raise funds for the yearly upkeep of the premises and it was and still is the dedicated efforts of all and such people who take it upon themselves to conclude this outstanding work. It is not an easy job and in a good many instances a very thankless undertaking. Within its confines it has been the recognized centre for all provincial and municipal voting for the immediate district, together with many a stormy meeting of proposed candidates for such office and many good laughs have been had at the remarks emanating from some of the speakers.

It is with pride and gratification that this writer looks back upon the community efforts of the people of the Ruskin district in the looking after a communal building worthy of all who enjoy its’ use. It could be of interest to some who may remember that the first duly elected committee for the first year, late in 1923, for the forthcoming year of 1924, were, namely Mildred Gilchrist, Charles Polack, Evelyn Monkman, H.V. Deane Freeman, Vera Finlay and this writer, Charles Miller, with the first duties being the organizing of a mixed badminton team with some remarkable players making their debut, two of the most outstanding the sister and brother team of Emma and Albert Thorstenson.

That spring saw two dances put on by this committee one in May, the next in June. With a profusion of cultivated and wild dowers they were advertised as a “May time” and a “June night” dance. The now well known orchestra of Edna Haywood was in attendance with the xylophone and an added attraction of a slowly rotating circular vari-coloured screen in front of a stationary electric light, set up in the balcony and providing a varied rainbow effect on the clothing of the dancers. So well attended were these two events that after all expenses were paid, over thirteen hundred dollars went to the bank account of the hall!

Down through the years many residents have taken office for the continuation of the upkeep of this hall, with the Hoppers, Hustons, Lees, Lobbs and others, looking after its’ welfare and in these duties have given unstintingly of effort and time. It has not been an easy task, for the ravages of time have seen a great deal of repair work which had to be done to keep the building serviceable, with many of these being major projects and included the renewal of the roof shingles twice!

The Japanese Nokai Hall

During the late 1920s the Japanese population had increased to proportions of three to one in their favour against the early white settlers and they now owned practically all the good arable and bottom land which they were using to raise remarkable prolific crops of raspberries and strawberries.

School law determined that all children attend the public schools in their district and in this respect the Japanese children faithfully attended, and with the roster showing the first pupil from the Japanese community appearing in the new Ruskin school in 1917, in fourteen short years, when this writer’s daughter first went to school in 1931 she was the only white girl attending.

Some years prior to this the Japanese elders decided that their children should be receiving more of their own teaching. Municipal authorities were approached at Haney for the purpose of obtaining land together with a permit for the erection of a Japanese community hall in the Ruskin area. Such permission was granted, land was purchased from one of the few remaining white settlers, a portion cleared and within a very short time a large hall was constructed by the people concerned. The site of this hall was on then what was known as Parker Road, now 280th Street, a short half mile north of River Road and its location, pinpointed, would be directly south of Mr. and Mrs. Rod Fraser’s stable, as a direct landmark, and its’ north wall was almost on the Fraser’s south boundary, with a large deep well for water for this hall between.

This hall was in constant use for over twenty years, by old and young alike, by members of the Japanese community, and the children upon leaving the Ruskin school, had to go directly to their school where a teacher of their nationality instructed them in Japanese culture. No trace or vestige of this hall remains today, as it was demolished, the well filled in and the land repurchased in the late 1940s.

Hall at Ruskin Dam

Consistent with the history of community halls in the district of Ruskin, another hall has served the people of that part of the community at the small village below the dam, at the homes there, for the past forty-five years and it would only be fair to relate its inception and historical background because during this time it has been in constant use by employees of the British Columbia Electric Railway Company Limited, now British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority.

Situated on the west side of Stave River in the midst of the small group of village houses, it was built primarily for the reception and entertaining of visiting dignitaries from throughout the world, who came in the early years of 1930 to tour the most modern hydro electric plant in existence at that time, then when that excursion was over they were wined and dined by a coterie of caterers who were brought up from Vancouver by train on each occasion.

Such events continued for a few short years, gradually declining until no further such parties were held and the little hall became unused and empty.

Social life in the immediate surroundings of the little village, at this time, had not reached the hectic tempo of the present day and after the building had remained unused for a lengthy period a meeting was held by several of the resident employees to formulate plans for the caretaking and use for gatherings and parties. Management was contacted and a tentative agreement drawn up in which it was agreed that the building would be turned over to a committee of employees for varied and sundry social activities.

At this time, the building, although well designed and sturdily built, was unlined and only sheathed with building paper against the wall studding and the floor consisted of plain lap jointed shiplap, which had shrunk, making dancing on it, virtually impossible. The committee again approached the owners to have permission granted to update and renovate the entire unit, the outcome being the usual one dollar contract and it was turned over to the villagers with an amendment that the company would do, within reason, certain renovations, with the company maintenance staff doing such work when occasion permitted.

This writer in charge of outside maintenance was asked by management to make a survey of the building, present a cost work order and if approved, the company would appropriate funds for the necessary work.

These intentions were carried out and it was established that a major work program regarding renewal and repairs to the building would be extensive and costly as the existing building had been built upon wooden ground foundations which were badly rotted, together with interior and other work brought the cost of renovation to a formidable figure. However, the company, with certain reservations which included the proviso that this work would only be carried on when other work necessary for the maintenance of power plant was not being done and over a goodly portion of time this is how the repairs were made.

The old foundations were replaced with cement and all defective supporting timbers replaced. The interior walls were covered with heavy "gyproc" plasterboard, whilst the existing shiplap floor was covered with a beautiful edge grain fir floor and all openings cased and trimmed, and the kitchen and toilet facilities brought up to standard. New lighting fixtures were installed together with a large ventilating fan and regulator.

During the renovations the little hall was in constant and varied use, with a gala party to celebrate completion of the work. Now, during nearly 45 years of use the little building is zealously looked after by Mrs. George "Patty" Mantle, who has been instrumental in establishing a first rate kindergarten school which has taken care of youngsters for a goodly area of the surrounding district, together with all other usual activities held in any similar rural surroundings.—



Charles A. Miller. *The Gazette*, Wednesday 27 May 1981.

The Outpost

From a contribution by Marjorie Houghton in the "Souvenir Booklet" Diamond Jubilee of Ruskin, BC, Canada 1824-1976

The first issue of *The Outpost* came out in March, 1975 and was the initial brainchild of the Ruskin Ratepayers Association. [numbered Vol. 1 No. 3 *fb*] Frustration of residents with regard to conditions in the area, poor roads, poor lighting, vandalism and lack of water had resulted in a motion to secede from Maple Ridge Municipality entirely.

Obviously, people from these outlying areas wanted to be heard and a monthly news bulletin appeared to be the answer. A committee of Ratepayers was then formed and their first meetings were held at the Hoofbeat Corral in Whonnock. Initially the bulletin was to run for a three-month trial period and to continue if reception was favourable. Circulation was to begin with 1500 copies to be circulated throughout the Ruskin, Whonnock area and to stores in Haney. A good financial basis had to be established and the local business people when approached were more than willing to support a local news bulletin. With this financial assurance and completely volunteer help *The Outpost* came into being.

The banner stated the aims and objectives which were to give factual reporting on controversial issues in the Ruskin and Whonnock areas and to provide news of the club and sporting activities so that all the residents will be made more aware of issues and events, and to provide a medium through which residents views may be expressed.

The first issue was typed and offset on blue paper with an Easter lily motif on the front page, since this issue coincided with Easter. The March issue was well received and in April it was decided to contact a former resident and historian, Charles Miller, to write a commentary on the background of the Ruskin area. Mr. Miller was more than happy to do so and provided detailed background material which ran for the issues April through September...

We are trying to complete a collection of photocopies of *The Outpost* for the Ruskin Archives. Call Fred Braches at 604 462 8942 if you have one or more issues we could copy.