

8. WHONNOCK



Showler's Red & White Store, Whonnock, River Road. Mr. Showler and his dog Smitty on the steps, circa 1927. [MRMA P00417]



The earliest European settlers in today's Maple Ridge were, or had been, employees of the Hudson's Bay Company. That was also the case in Whonnock, where in 1860, after finishing his contracts with the HBC in northern British Columbia and the Kamloops area, the young Shetlander Robert Robertson and his wife *Tselatsenate* settled next to a First Nations village with the name phonetically recorded as Honok or Ho'nak, translated as 'the place where there are (always) humpback salmon.'

Today's community of Whonnock owes its start to the coming of the transcontinental railway. The building contract for the railway called for a station to be built every ten miles and it so happened that Whonnock was ten miles away from Hammond. In 1884, recognizing the potential influx of new settlers the railroad would bring to the area, Noble Oliver, who came from Ontario, opened a general store close to the future station. The following year Oliver became the first postmaster of the post office officially called Whonnock. The C.P.R. did not follow suit and preferred using the name Wharnock for their station for more than 20 years. The newspapers at that time also used Warnock or Wharnock as the place name, and many of the newcomers to the community favoured this British version.

WHONNOCK

Postmaster, Geo. A. Smith.

Whonnock, Warnock or Wharnock, for it goes by all three names, is a flag station on the C.P.R., 33 miles from Vancouver. It is in the Dominion and Provincial Electoral District of New Westminster. The population is about 150, with four religious denominations and one church. There is also a school. The principal industry of the place is farming. Daily communication is made by the C.P.R.

1892 Williams Illustrated Official B.C. Directory, page 310.

Whonnock's first school opened in 1885 with the official name 'Stave River School.' Only in 1892 was the school's name changed to 'Whonnock School.' The name Stave River School was given to the first school in Ruskin when it opened in 1897.

The presence of a railway station, a store, a post office, a school, and church services in the one-room school house, turned 'the front' of Whonnock into a commercial and public hub for the surrounding area. The railway brought most of the early settlers from other parts of Canada but also settlers from abroad – mainly from Britain. Most of the men struggled making a living as labourers, lumbermen and seasonal fishermen.

THE HERITAGE RESOURCES OF MAPLE RIDGE

Some families tried their hand at farming but only succeeded in growing enough to feed themselves. The Norwegian professional fishermen who settled in Whonnock fared better because they cast their nets far beyond the Fraser River. A succession of Spilsbury brothers were among the first of more affluent English settlers who in the years before the First World War ‘ranched’ in the Whonnock area.

The early settlers immediately started clearing trees from the slopes along the Fraser but they did not prepare the land for farming. The logs they cut could be drawn downhill to the river with teams of horses or oxen to be sold and floated to sawmills. The settlers also produced firewood for feeding the insatiable steam boilers of the riverboats and the early locomotives and there was always a demand for railway ties. The settlers also used the wood to build and heat their houses.

After the First World War, some formerly inaccessible stands of trees could be harvested with primitive trucks. Only the improved trucks of the 1920s and 1930s allowed full-scale logging in the area and the start of some small local sawmills. Of those Whonnock Lumber, incorporated in 1929 by Zentaro Shin and two partners, is perhaps best remembered. Shin was a member of the Japanese community that after the First World War started farming and logging in Whonnock and neighbouring Ruskin. They turned large areas of land covered by bush and stumps into productive farms. That ended in 1942 with the forced evacuation of B.C.’s Japanese-Canadian population. There has been no commercial farming on a similar scale in the area before the arrival of the Japanese settlers or after they left.

The number of First Nations peoples, marginalized on the Whonnock Reserve, dwindled quickly and by the 1930s all ‘Whonnocks’ had either left to live a better life elsewhere or had passed away. The Whonnock Reserve then became part of the territory of the Kwantlen First Nation.

WHONNOCK SITES

- Stahl Residence / *Wilmart*, 26744 96 Avenue
- Cameron Residence, 26780 96 Avenue
- Robert Davidson Studio, 26914 112 Avenue
- Watson Residence, 9860 272 Street
- St. Paul’s Anglican Church / Private Residence, 10184 272 Street
- Lee Residence, 10225 272 Street
- Wildwood Fellowship Church, 10810 272 Street
- *Skyacres* (Boulanger House), 26011 Lougheed Highway
- Byrnes Residences, 26887 and 26903 River Road (Heritage Register)
- Whonnock Post Office, 26915 River Road (Heritage Register)
- Showler’s Red & White Store, 26927 River Road (Heritage Register) Former Whonnock United Church and Manse, 27091 River Road
- Holy Spirit Anglican Church, 27123 River Road

WHONNOCK CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

- Whonnock Cemetery, 96 Avenue (Heritage Register)
- Sugar Maple Trees, 26721 100 Avenue (Heritage Register)
- Robertson Family Cemetery, Byrnes Road (Designated)
- Basalt Lava Flows, Lougheed Highway / River Road and 272 Street



Beaver [BCA D-03562]

THE HERITAGE RESOURCES OF MAPLE RIDGE



STAHL RESIDENCE / WILMART
26744 96 Avenue
Circa 1911

This Craftsman bungalow was built for Charles A. Stahl, who was born in Silesia, Germany. He received British citizenship in 1901 in Australia and emigrated to Canada in 1902. By 1905 he was paying taxes on 20 acres in District Lot 434. He sold the lower part of his property in 1910, leaving him with 8.68 acres. His original home, a simple wooden structure, became an add-on to the new house. A Maple Ridge census of 1917 lists Stahl as a bachelor living alone on the property. He died in the spring of 1918.



Wilmart in 1963 [Courtesy Fred Braches]

In 1920, Miss Katherine MacMillan Martin and Miss Frederica Wilson (circa 1869-1935), professional nurses and veterans of the First World War, purchased the Stahl property. They called the house *WilMart*, combining parts of their surnames. After the Frederica's death in 1935, Miss Martin's sister Margaret and her husband Leslie Fergus Cameron built the adjacent bungalow (26780 96 Avenue) on the eastern third of the land.



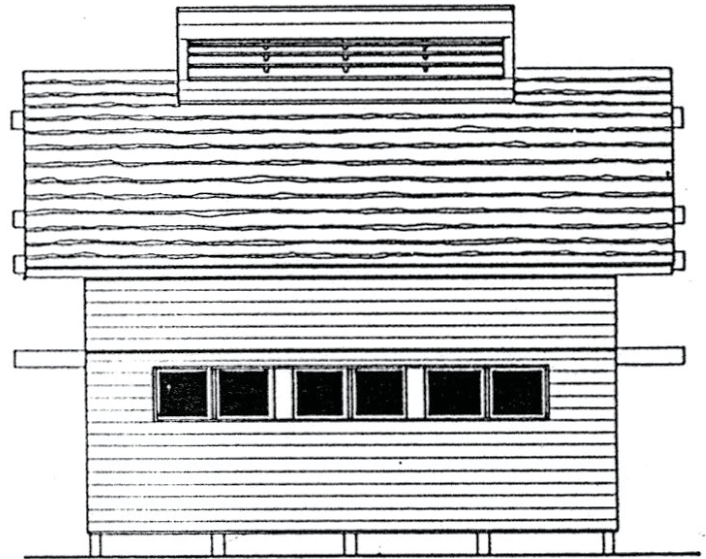
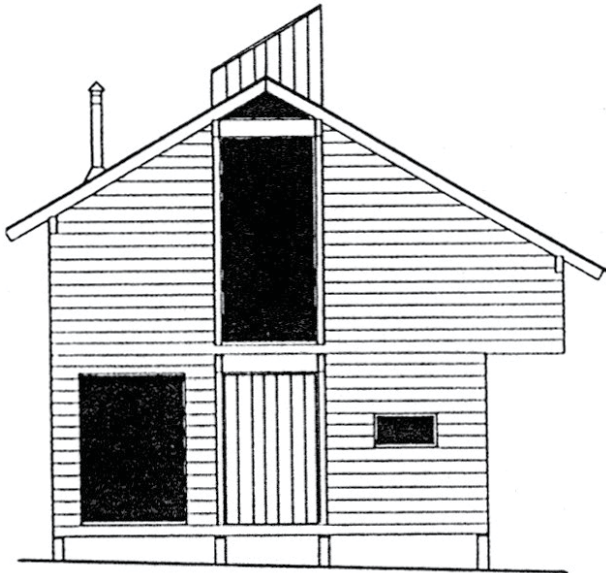
CAMERON RESIDENCE
26780 96 Avenue
1935

Margaret Cameron, and her husband Leslie Fergus Cameron (1896-1957), a veteran who had served overseas and achieved the rank of Lieutenant, built this bungalow on land owned by Margaret's sister; the lots were not subdivided until 1955. Leslie Cameron, born in Kenora, Ontario, was the son of Sir Douglas Colin Cameron (1854-1921), who served as the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba from 1911 to 1916.

I first came as a visitor in 1921 to my sister [Katherine Martin] who lived in the house next door and I thought that I had come to the end of the world compared with what I had been used to. We came on the train to begin with and all the transportation was on foot or by horse. Few people had horses – horse and buggy – but my sister didn't. Having always lived in a city, a fairly

good-sized city [Winnipeg, I found it very rough but I liked it. It was so different. You had to go down to the post office to get the mail and it was quite a long walk. You walked through two or three people's properties. The roads as they are now were non-existent. You had to go through somebody's property to get anywhere. I thought it was quite fun to be out here in the wilds of British Columbia. I stayed that year for a short time and I came again the next year and stayed longer. And I picked berries for my sister, they were into strawberries, and we picked the berries. For many years after that I came up to Whonnock quite a bit to see my sister but I did not come to live here until fifty years ago in 1935. And I am still here and I don't want to go anywhere else.
Margaret Cameron Interview, 1985.

THE HERITAGE RESOURCES OF MAPLE RIDGE



Elevations of Robert Davidson Studio. [Wood World, Second Quarter, 1973]

ROBERT DAVIDSON STUDIO
26914 112 Avenue
Rol Fieldwalker, Architect
1973

Robert Davidson is a well-known Haida artist, who works in wood, stone, silver and silkscreen. He built this studio next to his house. Many of the materials in the studio were recycled - a decrepit barn on the site was demolished, and other materials were salvaged from a boat shed owned by the architect.

'I think it's been one of my most enjoyable jobs. Not only because the project was interesting, but also because of the client's attitude. The relationship between client and designer is crucial to the success of any project. Here the relationship developed from one of mutual respect for each other's work into one of friendship. As an artist, Robert Davidson works his own way without compromise. And he extended that same rationale to me, leaving the design work up to me. He did

almost all the construction work himself, when he could spare time from his work, and he did a beautiful job.'

Rol Fieldwalker, as quoted in *Wood World*, Second Quarter, 1973, page 20



Robert Davidson Studio [Courtesy Fred Braches]



WATSON RESIDENCE
9860 272 Street (Street Address)
27236 Bell Avenue (Legal Address)
Robert A. Hamilton, Designer
1926

This house was built on a ten-acre parcel owned by Arthur George Major Watson (1891-1974) and his brother Lewis Henry Major Watson (born 1888); they were two of the nine children of early Whonnock pioneers Edward and Annie (Nee Major) Watson. In 1922, Arthur married Scottish-born teacher Maud Lillian Annie Excell (1891-1967) at St. John's church in Whonnock; this was the first wedding in the new church. When the house was complete, Arthur and Annie moved here. The assessed value of the house at the time of construction was \$1,000. Roofed with a complex gable, the house was built to the designs of retired Glasgow architect Robert A. Hamilton. The house, located at the corner of Bell Avenue and 272 Street is now part the Sunlab property of medical cannabis producer Tantalus Labs.



ST. PAUL'S ANGLICAN CHURCH / PRIVATE RESIDENCE
10184 272 Street
1891

For many years the only church building in Whonnock and the Stave River area had been the Roman Catholic Church on the Whonnock Reserve. The Anglican Parish of Whonnock originated with the construction of St. Paul's on land donated by Noble Oliver. In 1891 George and William Walden had started campaigning for a church building and it is said that their sister in England financed the building. Before the construction of their churches, Anglican and other clergymen preached at the little schoolhouse in Whonnock on the shore of the Fraser River. St. Paul's served the congregation until the construction in 1921 of today's Holy Spirit Anglican Church at 21299 River Road, earlier known as St. John the Evangelist church. Before construction of their own church on the Whonnock cemetery the Norwegian Lutheran community also used St. Paul's for their services. St. Paul's church has now been converted for use as a private residence.

THE HERITAGE RESOURCES OF MAPLE RIDGE



St. Paul's Anglican Church [Byrnes Collection]



LEE RESIDENCE
10225 272 Street
Circa 1914

"Resourceful, determined, and tremendously loyal, they made the very best of settlers." That is how Whonnock's Norwegians are described in *Maple Ridge, a History of Settlement*. At the core of that important group of settlers were the Lee and Nelson families, originating from the Trondheim area of Norway, and related through marriage.

The migration of these two families started in 1887 with the fishermen-farmer Ole Lee Sr. – who was 49 at the time – and his oldest sons Axel and Ole Jr. John Christian Nelson and his wife Anna and their children, the youngest just three months of age, travelled with them. The Nelson family soon settled in Whonnock but Ole Lee and his sons led ambulant lives for the following three years, fishing between the Skeena River and the Queen Charlotte Islands, as his sons



Axel Bernard Lee and Anna Oline Lee, prior to 1929. [Photo courtesy Nancy (Lee) Webster]

would continued to do in later years. In 1891 Ole Lee went back to Norway, returning with the rest of his family in 1892 and settling for good in Whonnock. In 1898, Yukon gold lured some of the Lees north but Axel and Ole Jr. soon returned to Whonnock and their wives and family.

In 1896, Axel Bernard Lee married Anna Oline Nelson. Of their five children, two lived in Whonnock all their lives: Hank (Henry Bertram) and Ted (Theodore Marmaduke). Axel Lee died in 1929 at the age of 63; Anna died in 1972 at the age of 92.

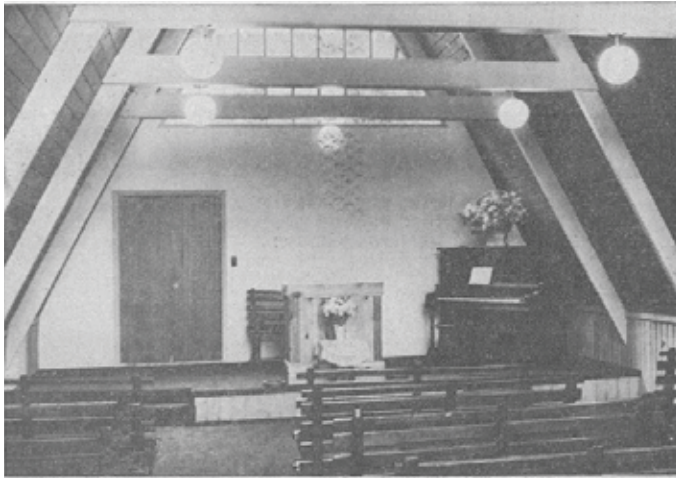
Axel's brother Olaus Lee, a master carpenter, constructed this grand house. It has an inset open front verandah supported on square columns, distinctive diamond-shaped insets in the stucco column bases, a tall side gable roof and a prominent front dormer.



WILDWOOD FELLOWSHIP CHURCH
10810 272 Street
1966-69

Construction of the Wildwood Baptist Church (now Wildwood Fellowship Church) was started by volunteers in 1966. The building replaced the adjacent Whonnock Baptist Church building that had served the community since 1952. Francis Selvey and Mabel Clara (Gould) Selvey were instrumental in the establishment and success of the Baptist church in Whonnock. The Selvey family moved from Hatzic Prairie in 1947 to Whonnock and initiated the church as an offshoot of the Mission Baptist Church. The new church was formally opened on June 14, 1969. Typical of contemporary church design of the time, an expressionistic A-frame roof was used as a major design element.

THE HERITAGE RESOURCES OF MAPLE RIDGE



View of interior, 1969. [Gazette, June 25, 1969, page 2]

Whonnock Church Opening Proved Musical Event: Several years ago a building fund was opened and much of the needed for this fine new building has been donated by the Sunday School children by means of a building fund march each Sunday. The construction has all been done by volunteer labour supervised by Deacon Lyle Selvey. As the new building now stands only \$300 is owing on it.
Gazette, June 25, 1969, page 2.



SKYACRES THE BOULANGER RESIDENCE 26011 Lougheed Highway 1909

Originally owned by Augustus F. Boulanger and his wife Annie Elizabeth 'Beth' (née Spilsbury), this well-maintained home is one of the earliest remaining in the Whonnock area. It is a simple rectangular plan house, with a bellcast hip roof and an open front verandah. Set at the crest of a hill, it faces south to a view of the Fraser River. The site is heavily landscaped, and has many mature trees and shrubs. Augustus Boulanger died in 1938 at the age of 75.



BYRNES RESIDENCES
26887 River Road and 26903 River Road
1937

■ **Heritage Register**

At one time the site where the two houses are standing was part of the land owned by Margaret Gouinlock 'Granny' Benson (1884-1937). By the time of her death, one of her daughters, Winifred Mary Gordon (1881-1951), had these two houses built as rental properties. Ralph Daniels and Ray Selves built the houses. Clad with board-and-batten siding, the houses are roofed with large split barn shakes.

The Byrnes family came to Whonnock in 1919 when Brian was four years old. They settled on a farm at the top of the present Byrnes Road where Brian and his siblings grew up. As an adult Brian owned and operated a garage at two different locations on Loughheed Highway. His wife Isabel, a daughter of Hector and Ruth Ferguson (née Rolley), became an

adored primary school teacher in Whonnock. Isabel and Brian married in 1939. In 1941 the young couple rented the house at 26903 River Road. They bought the house in 1946, around the same time Brian's brother H.J. (Barney) Byrnes, returning from the war in Europe, acquired the adjacent house at 26887 River Road; Barney was known for his resistance work undertaken from Vatican City. In 1964, Brian and Isabel purchased that house from Barney.

The Byrnes house was given a CHC plaque in 1999 and in 2001 the Community Heritage Commission presented Brian with a Heritage Achievement Award in recognition of his contribution towards the conservation and enrichment of heritage in Maple Ridge.

THE HERITAGE RESOURCES OF MAPLE RIDGE

Brain and Isabel left the two houses on River Road and the beautifully wooded property behind to the Whonnock Foundation, established in 1994 to assist, encourage, and promote the well-being of residents of Whonnock and Ruskin. Their generous bequest allowed the Whonnock Foundation to initiate the Byrnes Bursary, a bursary program directed at post-secondary (university, college, or technical school) students from the area between 256th Street and the Stave River.

Brian and Isabel also bequeathed their unique and valuable collection of First Nations artifacts to the Maple Ridge Museum.



WHONNOCK POST OFFICE
26915 River Road (Street Address)
26915 96 Avenue (Legal Address)
1932

■ Heritage Register

A post office was established in Whonnock in 1885 in the general store owned and operated by Noble Oliver, who became the first postmaster. The general store burned down in February 1916 and was never rebuilt. Subsequently the postmaster at that time, Richard Stanley Whiting, moved the post office to a small building on the land where it still stands today. The post office was rebuilt in 1928, and again, for the final time, in 1932. Contrary to the CPR who preferred the spelling Wharnock for their station, the post office always carried the name Whonnock with exception of the period from 1939 to 1960 when the Canadian Permanent Committee on geographical names in Ottawa dictated that the name should be spelled with one "n" – "Whonock." This post office is the home of the last true postmaster in the Lower Mainland. It stands in the very centre of the Whonnock commercial area, and is symbolic of the community that it has served for many years.



SHOWLER'S RED & WHITE STORE
26927 River Road
1919-20

■ **Heritage Register**

Built by Nils C. Nelson in 1919-20, the store was initially owned and operated by F.W. Showler as an independent general store. Frederick William Showler (1872-1949) was born in London Ontario, and worked as a carpenter. On June 30, 1897, he was married to Emma Elizabeth (née Showler, 1877-1947). They moved to Maple Ridge in 1919, and operated this store until Frederick retired in 1946. In later years the store was associated with the Red & White retail chain of independently-owned and operated stores. The store and the adjacent post office are the survivors of a once self-supporting and self-contained commercial centre the residents used to refer to as "the Front."



Showler's Red & White Store, Whonnock, River Road. Mr. Showler and his dog Smitty on the steps, circa 1927. [MRMA P00417]

THE HERITAGE RESOURCES OF MAPLE RIDGE



Whonnock United Church, circa 1930. [BCA B-01068]

**FORMER WHONNOCK UNITED
CHURCH AND MANSE
27091 River Road
Robert A. Hamilton, Designer
1914**

This striking country church was built for a Presbyterian congregation on land donated by John Brodie. It was designed by Scottish-born Robert Armour Hamilton (1866-1958); he was a retired architect from Glasgow and farmed in Whonnock, but he occasionally prepared plans for local buildings. Carpenter Olaus Lee and volunteers constructed the building. The church was dedicated in September 1914. John Brodie's home next to the church, built at the same time as the church, became the 'Christian Education Building' and a gathering place for the members of the congregation. In the summer of 2010, the Webster's Corners and Whonnock United Churches merged, ending almost a century of continuing services in the church in Whonnock.





Exterior of St. John's Anglican Church at Whonnock, January 1957. [A.L. Yates, photographer. CVA Bu P508.91]

HOLY SPIRIT ANGLICAN CHURCH
27123 River Road
1921

In 1921 the Anglican parish built this new church to replace St. Paul's and gave it the name St. John the Evangelist. In January 2008 the church again received a new name: Holy Spirit Anglican Church. A church hall was built in the 1930s, which was replaced by Cameron Hall in 1985. The church retains its authentic character, including its shingle cladding, plank doors with wrought iron strap hinges and Gothic pointed-arch windows.



WHONNOCK CULTURAL LANDSCAPES



WHONNOCK CEMETERY
96 Avenue

■ Heritage Register

Around 1890, Norwegian settlers from an area near Trondheim came to Whonnock. In 1895 they formed the *Trondheim Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation*, and used St. Paul's Anglican Church for their services. After considering other sites they decided to build their own church and a churchyard

on land adjacent to the Whonnock Reserve that was owned by fellow-Norwegian Ole Lee Jr. The first burial was in 1905. The Lutheran Church, built on the site in 1907, served the Norwegians and their descendants until the 1940s. The church was taken down in 1958. In 1919 the municipality of Maple Ridge purchased an acre of Reserve land to the east of the Norwegian churchyard to be used as a general cemetery for the Whonnock and Ruskin areas. In 1982 the Norwegian cemetery was added to the municipal cemetery. Two commemorative plaques, celebrating the Lee family and the Japanese community, further demonstrate the non-sectarian nature of this burial ground.

Bordering the cemetery to the east are the remnants of the cemetery of the Roman Catholic church that once stood on the Whonnock Reserve. Before the establishment of the cemetery the residents buried their loved ones in Maple Ridge, Mission, or Sapperton if they could afford that. Many of their children and some adults were simply buried on the land where they had lived.



SUGAR MAPLE TREES
26721 100 Avenue
1914

■ **Heritage Register**

In 1914 William Charles 'Will' Drewry and Mary Jane 'Jean' (née Graham) Drewry planted these two trees. These magnificent specimen trees, landmarks in the local area, started from saplings originally from Perth, Ontario.

THE HERITAGE RESOURCES OF MAPLE RIDGE



ROBERTSON FAMILY CEMETERY **Byrnes Road**

■ **Designated Municipal Heritage Site**

Robert Robertson was an emigrant from the Shetland Islands, and worked for the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Langley. In 1884 he pre-empted District Lot 433, the core of today's Whonnock, and remained here the rest of his life. Robertson was buried at this site in 1912, but it was not the first burial here. In total, there are at least five adults and a larger number of children interred at this site.