

# WHONNOCK NOTES

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

Series Editor: Fred Braches

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## It Was a Wonderful Life

Brian & Isabel Byrnes

Fred Braches



In 2002 the Whonnock Community Association received the Heritage Achievement Award from the Maple Ridge Community Heritage Commission for the WCA's contribution towards the conservation and enrichment of heritage in Maple Ridge.

Starting with the "Historical Project" in the summer of 1985 the WCA collects records (documents and photographs) related to the past of Whonnock and Whonnockians. Since 1997 the growing collection, known as Whonnock Archives, has been kept at the Mission Community Archives. The collection is accessible to anyone interested in our past.

The Whonnock Community Association endorses the publication of *Whonnock Notes* and similar publications based on information from the Whonnock Archives, and welcomes any suggestions and actions that would contribute to a better knowledge of the past of our community and its inhabitants.

The Whonnock Community Association asks you to search your files for any documents or photographs relating to Whonnock and Whonnockians. If you don't want to donate the documents or photographs, we would be very happy to just keep a copy or scan in the Whonnock Archives. Give us a chance to preserve the past.

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*It Was a Wonderful Life: Brian and Isabel Byrnes*  
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## EDITOR'S NOTE



On 22 September 2003, Brian Byrnes, long-time resident of Whonnock, passed away, following his wife Isabel, who had died six years before him.

Brian and Isabel Byrnes live on in the hearts and minds of so many who found time to enter their cozy house and share a coffee and an enriching talk with them. Visits to the turtles, frogs, and fish are remembered by youngsters, many of whom returned as parents to show their own children that paradise is where we make it.

The Byrnes reference library went to the Maple Ridge Museum where it will be made accessible to everyone, as Brian would have liked it. The Whonnock Community Association inherited the eclectic documentary legacy of Brian and Isabel Byrnes. The Byrnes documents will be part of the Whonnock Archives—stored at the Mission Community Archives—accessible to anyone interested in Whonnock and Whonnockians.

Several years ago I published some information about Brian and Isabel and their families in Whonnock Notes No.4, “Brian and Other Friends.” This issue of Whonnock Notes combines the text of published articles about Brian and Isabel with a selection of a few notes and handwritten copies of letters, written mostly by Brian, that escaped his always hungry woodstove. It should provide a glimpse of what made these two people special.

Among the handwritten records Brian Byrnes left us, my favourite is the following draft letter he wrote in 1981. In that letter Brian spoke out about issues that still concern us, although there are encouraging signs of change.

Brian’s worries about unrecorded memories and loss of archival heritage material triggered the Whonnock Community Association’s Historical Project of 1985 and ultimately the creation of the Whonnock Archives and continuing research of Whonnock’s past.

In his later life Brian copied numerous images using one of the light tables he had designed and built for the Archaeological Society to record private collections of prehistoric artifacts.

More than 20 years after he wrote this letter, Brian was pleased to hear about the recognition of Maple Ridge as “A Community of Communities,” but even more about the planned new museum & archives building. This may have led to his final decision to will his anthropological collection to the Maple Ridge Historical Society.

*Draft letter by Brian Byrnes to Mrs. Clayton, March 1981.*

MAY I comment on your letter of last week in the *News*?

I believe that the history of a municipality should be the concern of the whole area.

I further believe that Council with its total dedication to the “core” at the expense of almost total neglect of the rest of the area has engendered a hardness—almost an “I’m all right Jack” attitude which is the enemy of community enterprises, historical and any other groups, which do not have hard dollars as a product.

We are surrounded by districts with outstanding museums and parent historical societies: Mission, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Langley—even Pitt Meadows Historical Society has the goodwill and understanding of their Council.

Most areas in BC that have successful historical and associated societies seem to have a common factor—the full co-operation of Council and in spite of small “spats” a general neighbourliness and concern.

It would be nice if the Chamber of Commerce would realize that there are actual places called Ruskin, Whonnock, Albion, Websters Corners, Yennadon, Haney, and Hammond—all able to contribute to the cultural well-being of the municipality as a whole. As long as the concept “outlying areas” suitable for real estate prevails there isn’t a chance.

Maple Ridge is a rich, beautiful and historic area, but we have suffered terrible archival and heritage losses and hardly a week goes by without the loss of an old pioneer with his or her unrecorded memories—and their boxes of old brown un-copied photographs are thrown on the Haney dump.



Uli Seizer

## BRIAN BYRNES: 1914-2003

### PROPERTY, ARTIFACTS WILLED TO COMMUNITY

Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows News  
27 September 2003. Karin Mark.

EVEN in his passing, Brian Byrnes took care of his beloved Whonnock and its history.

Byrnes died Monday of pneumonia at age 89 in Port Coquitlam's Hawthorne Lodge. With the help of friends, he had lived on his own in his 1930s home until June.

In his last year of life, the historian, archaeologist and fervent Whonnock supporter sowed the seeds for a permanent gift to his community—he bequeathed his two heritage homes and property to the Whonnock Foundation, and his extensive collection of Native and archeological artifacts to the Maple Ridge Museum.

And this May, he obtained provincial heritage status to prevent any future development of the property, its mature trees and two 1930s buildings, which formed part of Whonnock's historic centre.

"It's a real legacy for the future," said Sheila Nickols, a fellow historian who had often consulted Byrnes on east Maple Ridge history. "He really had a feeling for Maple Ridge—well, Whonnock first and Maple Ridge second."

Byrnes was born in Langley Prairie in 1914, but moved to Whonnock at age five and spent most of his life there. The automotive garage owner and his schoolteacher wife Isabel, who passed away about five years ago, developed a keen interest in archaeology that became a hobby

during their working years and a fulltime volunteer job after their retirement in the 1960s.

The fruits of that passion were an immense knowledge of the area's history, an extensive library of archaeological records and books and a broad collection



18 May 1999

of artifacts—some their own, some entrusted to their care.

"I always found him very warm and generous with his time and his information," said Nickols, former curator of Maple Ridge Museum. "He is one of a smallish group of people who are really key in the history of the district. They were here, they lived through it. Not everyone has a mind for recording it. He did."

Maple Ridge Museum curator Val Patenaude, an archaeologist herself, said the Byrnes bequest includes a number of items that will be unique to the museum's collection, including out-of-print reference books and handcrafts.

"He really did have Whonnock's museum and I feel extremely fortunate that he trusted us enough to pass it along to us."

The Byrneses may have been self-taught, but their collection doesn't show it, Patenaude said.

"It's museum quality," she said. "Brian was a fellow with no professional training in any of this, who developed himself into a skilled researcher and record keeper who is second to none."

Once itemized, the collection—now in a secure location—will form part of provincial-class displays in the new museum site, Patenaude said.

Elizabeth and Geoff Hancock developed a lasting friendship with Byrnes after Elizabeth interviewed him for her former newspaper column in the *News* a decade ago. "He was a teacher and a mentor and a fascinating person. His knowledge of the area was absolutely unbelievable," she said. "When someone like that dies, a bit of an area's history goes. I feel he's going to leave a big hole there."

In his will, Byrnes left his property to the Whonnock Foundation for the purpose of promoting wellbeing in Whonnock and Ruskin.

"I think it's a wonderful thing he's done. He'll always be remembered," said Sue Schulze, who runs the Whonnock post office next door to Byrnes's property.

"He was Whonnock, you know. 'Mr. Whonnock' is what we would call him. If you wanted to know anything about Whonnock, you asked Brian. It's very, very sad he's gone."

## A TRUE WHONNOCKIAN

Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows News  
27 September 2003, Fred Braches

BRIAN BYRNES celebrated his 89th birthday on September 12—the day Maple Ridge remembered its 1874 incorporation. He died only a few days later.

No person lived longer in Whonnock than Brian. He came to Whonnock at the age of five and stayed most of his life, always in touch with many old-timers, some of whom are still around to deplore the loss of their contemporary.

Brian was a good man. He had many friends, a sparkle in his eyes, and always a joke and a story to tell you. He was also a good listener, a quality he confided to me he had highly developed in the last years when communications became increasingly difficult for him. In spite of his frail condition he never lost his sense of humour.

Brian was a man with many talents and a lifelong curiosity. He had an extensive reference library covering the many subjects of his particular interest such as paddlewheelers, lumbering, plants, animals, geology, the weather, archaeology, history, clocks and watches, First Nations.

He was a modest, frugal man enjoying a simple life. Although he liked to meet people in his own cozy house, he did not enjoy crowds and generally avoided public gatherings. That also explains his wish that no memorial service be held for him.

He shared his wide field of interests with his wife, long-time

Whonnock teacher Isabel Margaret Ferguson, whose love for nature and flowers inspired him. With Isabel he started collecting archaeological artifacts along the exposed riverbanks at low water. No, pothunters they were not, but true vocational archaeologists, recording and describing every find and mapping the locations where they were found. Long time and well respected members of the Archaeological Society of BC, they volunteered at many archaeological excavations in the 1970s and 1980s. It was on their suggestion that the ASBC started the ambitious plan of recording many private collections as a resource for studies.

Foremost was Brian and Isabel's interest in Whonnock: its past, present, and future. They were active members of the community. For instance, in the late 1960s, Brian and Isabel were active and hardworking members of a small committee struggling to successfully recover the second "N" in the name Whonnock, removed in 1939 by the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names in Ottawa.

Tired of seeing so many of the old buildings torn down, Brian also joined the group fighting hard to preserve and revive the old Whonnock Hall—without success. Again, Brian and Isabel were there in May 1987 when the first spade was stuck in the ground starting the building of the Whonnock Centre at Whonnock Lake.

Brian took an active part in the efforts avoiding the annihilation

of Whonnock's post office and he rejoiced in its endurance and the revival of "The Front" as a vibrant centre, rather than a doomed area waiting to be demolished. How much he enjoyed seeing his house, the post office and the "Red and White Store" distinguished by the Community Heritage Commission with a Heritage Plaque. Brian was a fount of information on Whonnock's past and this knowledge was frequently used by local historians and other interested people. When in 1985 the Whonnock Community Association collected historical information, the Byrneses shared generously what they had and knew and contributed what they could. In 2001 Brian's dedication to the history and heritage of the community was recognized by the Maple Ridge Heritage Commission with a Heritage Achievement Award.

In the spring of this year Brian applied for Heritage Designation for his property, providing protection through a bylaw. Brian's houses and garden with the magnificent stand of mature native trees on the hill behind it forms the backdrop of the entrance to Whonnock. It was one of his great consolations to know that Maple Ridge Council approved his application in May of this year.

Brian will be sorely missed in our community as a friend and neighbour. For me and many others he was a mentor teaching us the values of a small community and particularly of Whonnock which he so dearly loved.

## A FOND FAREWELL TO ISABEL BYRNES

*The Midden, publication of the Archaeological Society of British Columbia, Vol. 29/3, Autumn 1997.*  
Fred Braches

I WANT to pay my respects to a friend who was without malice, always willing to smile and see the funny side of humankind. People and nature fascinated her. Sunshine, flowers, squirrels, fishes, frogs, turtles, and friends surrounded her through many happy years. She was full of energy and dedicated to the world around her. She was much loved by all who knew her, including hundreds of school children she taught for some thirty years at Whonnock's school. She is sadly missed by her husband Brian and all of us who knew her.

Isabel and Brian, her partner for more than half a century, gained a substantial knowledge of the archaeology of British Columbia and in particular of the lower Fraser. They joined the ASBC at a very early date. Many of the Society's older members will remember Isabel from our meetings, and as a tireless participant at the "digs." With Brian at her side she worked an unimaginable number of days as a volunteer in the field, wherever the ASBC participated and at other university and museums' excavations. The "Byrneses" generously shared their experience and knowledge and, with care and patience, guided many a greenhorn to become a useful volunteer, at least able to recognize fire-cracked rock.

Isabel Margaret Byrnes was an offspring of well-known settlers of the Maple Ridge area who came west when the first trains crossed the mountains into British Columbia. On her mother's side was the Rolley family of Whonnock and on her father's side the Ferguson family of Port



Heini Braches

Haney. As a child Isabel collected "arrow-heads" along the shores of Kanaka Creek, where the Ferguson family lived, and that early interest honed her keen eye. She could spot an artifact anywhere.

Some time early in the 1940s Isabel's interest in the remnants of the First Nations' past was rekindled with a chance find of a projectile point at Whonnock Creek. When the war-effort no longer absorbed their weekends, Isabel and Brian started a systematic survey which extended

over many decades. In winter, when the water levels are at their lowest and the professional archaeologist are working inside, Brian and Isabel traced the shorelines, located sites and salvaged exposed artifacts. They covered the banks of the Fraser, Stave, Pitt, Harrison and other waters, particularly on the north shore of the Fraser, and drew a set of maps showing the areas which they surveyed over the years, marking probable sites of human occupation.

From an earlier phase collecting "curiosities" they quickly evolved to become responsible avocational archaeologists, guided by the aims and ethics of the Society. Isabel dedicated much time carefully describing the artifacts and the location of their finds Michael Cranny and Don Bunyan reported: "The precise, detailed and complete records of their activities as amateur archaeologists kept by the Byrneses for many years would be of great value to anyone studying the archaeology of the Valley."<sup>1</sup>

Many of the locations Isabel and Brian recorded are now lost to stream and tide,<sup>2</sup> and other sites have been destroyed by development or looted by pot hunters. The artifacts Isabel and Brian salvaged are often the only ones remaining which can be traced back to these sites and some of the sites would not even have been known without the records made by the Byrneses.

Isabel and Brian learned about collections of artifacts in private

hands and became aware of the lack of and potential loss of information related to these items. They encouraged neighbours and friends to have their artifacts and provenance recorded. These early efforts lead to the ambitious “Private Collections” project of the ASBC. In particular the members of the Fraser Valley Chapter of the ASBC, of which Isabel and Brian were founding members, distinguished themselves in the recording of numerous collections in the Valley as described in *The Midden* 28/4.

As few others in the Society, today and yesterday, Isabel and Brian recognized and demonstrated the importance of enthusiastic, dedicated and knowledgeable amateurs in the field of BC archaeology. Actions rather than words marked Isabel’s path. She never wanted to stand in the limelight and wished to “slip away quietly”, but that should not mean unnoticed. The members of the ASBC remember her fondly and want to say farewell to a friend who, in her own quiet way, made a difference to many and who gave so much of herself to the ASBC and to BC archaeology.

<sup>1</sup>Michael W. Cranny and Donald E. Bunyan. *Report on the Archaeological Survey of the North Side of the Fraser River*. Archaeological Sites Advisory Board. 1975.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Kidd reported on the Byrnes Site (DhRp 14) in the summer of 1963 that it was “rapidly eroding during seasonal stages of high water and is in imminent danger of washout from the Fraser and a nearby creek”. Robert S. Kidd, “Archaeological survey in the Lower Fraser River Valley.” *National Museums of Canada, Bulletin 224, Contributions to Anthropology VI: Archaeology and Physical Anthropology*. 1963.

## MEMORIES OF WHONNOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 1934 TO 1939

*Draft letter by Isabel Byrnes to “Ted and June,” undated.*

AS MARRIED women during the Depression did not teach I resigned in 1939 but was called back in 1943. And so, I was not present when the Japanese children left. But I remember how sad I felt. Of course we all thought they would return.

The School Reunion May 8, 1965 brought pupils and letters from across Canada and since then we have been delighted to have our own reunions with Brian’s garage friends and my pupils with their children.

The Primary Room held the first three grades with 35 to 40 pupils. The children worked and played together as little children always do, serious about their lessons and eager as puppies at play-time. I was a complete failure in one classroom game they choose: “Poor Pussy.” I invariably laughed and was “out”, whereas the little Noburo or Masako always won a turn, serious and sympathetic, as they calmly stroked the outrageous small creature meowing desperately on all fours. I envied their self-control.

[Japanese] people’s offspring were higher achievers in subjects such as writing, art, physical ed. In arithmetic I think about even with the non-Japanese who were better in reading and composition. By grade III they would be about even. For a time the children attended Japanese classes after school.

The parents were always friendly. Some of the mothers, too busy, perhaps shy, or unsure of their English, sent an elder daughter to represent the family at school events. They were a charming little group.

But everyone turned out for the Christmas Concert held in the Whonnock Memorial Hall. Annie Bosman very kindly volunteered as pianist for our musical plays. The actors, everyone, were all appropriately costumed thanks to my loving mother and other enthusiastic parents. I remember two beautifully costumed little Japanese girls in kimonos, sashes folded just so, hairdos, with makeup and lovely fans. Just perfect. That is we put on *The Wedding of the Painted Doll*.

Brian built the huge Mother Goose Book and Noah’s Ark for the stage. He transformed a small boy’s wagon into “a beautiful pea-green boat” for *The Owl and the Pussycat*. We had a splendid curtain. The Hall was crammed every year—standing room only.

If a child didn’t happen to be one of the actors, he would be lustily singing in the chorus. We did *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The frog who would a-wooing go*, etc. etc. Shy children became quite extroverted and mixed happily as children do. It sounds as if we played a lot but the School Inspector gave us splendid reports.



## PUPILS



*Isabel Ferguson's Class of 1938-1939.  
Who is who?*

*Names and ages from the last attendance register Isabel signed with her maiden name "Ferguson." The list covers the period from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May to the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1939.*

1. Bryan, Vivia	8	20. Nabeta, Saeko	6
2. Catherwood, Ann Marie	6	21. Nakano, Kazuki	6
3. Chapman, Lillian	10	22. Odell, Billy	6
4. Chapman, Rose	8	23. Parson, Eleanor	8
5. Cottell, Shirley	9	24. Shimizu, Chieko	8
6. Davey, Gerald	7	25. Shimizu, Jadashi	7
7. Davey, Roger	6	26. Shin, Yoshiro	7
8. Fredbeck, Douglas	8	27. Shoji, Hidee	7
9. Hammer, Billy	7	28. Shono, Sumiye	7
10. Hargitt, Lorraine	7	29. Swinden, Gerry	6
11. Henderson, Norman	6	30. Tokuyasu, Mitsuye	7
12. Ikeda, Sieki	7	31. blank	
13. Ishikawa, Yoshiko	7	32. Isuyuki, Jamaye	8
14. Itaya, Koji	8	33. Young, Jacky	6
15. Kato, Rosabel	6	34. Zarnowski, Anna	7
16. Lawrence, Beverley	7	35. Kato, Mieko	7
17. Maehara, Isamu	7	36. Odell, Patty	8
18. Maehara, Yasuko	9	37. Gillespie, Bruce	9
19. Miki, Joshikatsu	7	38. Akerly, Joan	6

*Isabel Ferguson married Brian Byrnes on 31 August 1939 and, since only unmarried women were allowed to teach, she resigned from her position. But she returned to teaching in 1943.*

## WHONNOCK SCHOOL REUNION TO HONOR ISABEL BYRNES

Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows Gazette  
? May 1965

TO MARK 30 years of teaching in Maple Ridge schools, 28 years of which were at Whonnock Elementary school, a school reunion will be held in Whonnock Memorial Hall, Saturday, May 8th, from 3 to 8 p.m.

Mrs. Isabel Byrnes will be honored by the committee with: the presentation of a school register book and a bell from the school.

The book will carry the names of nearly 1000 students who attended the school and who were taught by Mrs. Byrnes over the past 28 years.

The reunion committee is Mrs. Lois Agasse, Mrs. H. Pullen, Mrs. L. Tooke, Mrs. H. Hollinshead, Mrs. T. Lee, Mrs. R. Daniels.

Many of the 1000 students are expected to attend the reunion period of 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. The presentation to Mrs. Byrnes is planned for 4 p.m., May. 8th. Persons interested or former students of the school may phone any member of the reunion committee for information.

The reunion is of interest to residents from all sections of the municipality. Mrs. Byrnes attended school in Maple Ridge and is a member of a pioneer family.

## RESPECT AND AFFECTION SHOWN WHONNOCK TEACHER



The Gazette

Mrs. Isabel Byrnes was surrounded by pupils of her class at school, two of them from her class of 1933...pupils are Howard Henderson of Ucluelet and Mrs. Viola Southgate (nee Westerlund) of Cultus Lake.

Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows Gazette  
20 May 1965

THE ISABEL BYRNES reunion which was held at the Whonnock Memorial Mall on May 8 was attended by over 600 persons, most of whom were former students. Open House was held from 3 to 8 p.m. and a dance concluded the evening.

Mrs. Byrnes arrived at 3:30 p.m. and was presented with an orchid corsage by her niece Margie Ferguson, a former student. A corsage was also presented to Mrs. Byrnes's mother, Mrs. R. Ferguson.

At 4 p.m. a short formal program was held, V. Agasse acting

as M.C. Opening address by Mrs. V. Agasse said in part, "The community of Whonnock has set aside this day to join the students in honoring Mrs. Byrnes, who in 28 years started two generations on the road to higher education and a fuller life."

The Whonnock elementary school choir under direction of R. A. Lowther sang four selections. R. E. Lester, school board chairman, stressed the fact that it was a reunion rather than a retirement ceremony, and the number of those present attested to the fact of the important part Mrs. Byrnes had played in the life of the community.

J. Cameron of the Maple Ridge Teacher's Association in making the presentation said he had the privilege of working with Mrs. Byrnes and that her class had been used as a demonstration classroom for new teachers

Diane Watson presented the old school bell, which was engraved with "I. Byrnes" and "happy memories," and led in the singing of "For she's a jolly good fellow."

Mrs. Jane Hitchen, a former student and now a teacher, presented the hand engraved book containing the names of all her former students numbering over 1000; Mrs. Hitchen said that as Mrs. Byrnes meant something different to all who knew her she couldn't say anything more appropriate than to quote the dedication contained in the book which read "Dedicated to our teacher who Dedicated herself to us." Mrs. Hitchen made reference to the hours Mrs. Byrnes spent in preparation each day, not only in her first year, but through to her 30th year.

Mrs. Byrnes in thanking everyone said in part, "I've enjoyed all these years; with each bringing new faces of bubbling enthusi-



*Teacher's Pet*

asm, and if I'm not speaking as you think a school marm should, it is probably because I have lived in what one might call a never, never land, and like Peter Pan where the people always remained small."

The choir closed with an appropriate number, "This little light of mine."

Before breaking up the program, Mrs. Byrnes's husband Brian was presented with a framed motto which read "Teacher's Pet" and Mr. Agasse in presenting it said, Mrs. Byrnes is noted for showing no favouritism through the years, and he, Brian was the only person who could claim the title.

Letters, pictures and flowers were given to Mrs. Byrnes from students in many parts of Canada and U.S. who were unable to attend. A cake was made by Mrs. S. Carlson in the form of an open book inscribed "Our Memory Book." Students had travelled from many parts of B.C. to attend among them Howard Henderson of Ucluelet and Mrs. Viola Southgate (nee Westerland) of Cultus Lake. The day was a testimony of the respect and affection, of all who know Mrs. Byrnes.

The Gazette

## WORDS OF THANKS MAY 1965

*Isabel Byrnes.*

EITHER I have been extremely unobservant or you have been extremely clever. I understand this wonderful party was planned months ago. The work involved in such a reunion leaves me completely shaken. Thank you all so very much!

Primary teaching in Whonnock all these years has been a most happy experience. But it was you people who made it so. All those hundreds hard working, good humoured little children, helpful school boards, kind words and little notes from parents, the encouragement from superintendents, inspectors, supervisors, principals & fellow teachers and always my humorous ever-loving family.

I think teaching the first grades requires an immense enthusiasm and an overdeveloped sense of humour helps too. It was fun all the way and the years just sailed by.

All those bubbly laughing little people, the fresh bursts of energy brought forth by a wink across the class room, a pat on the head, a little teasing, and what was known as a "growl from the teacher."

If I sound somewhat un-academic it's due I think to living in a "Never Never Land" with a band of Peter Pans who were forever young.

Thank you all for a most wonderful day.

**Retiring from Business**

*Thank You . . .*

We wish to take this opportunity of thanking our many friends and customers who have patronized us for the past many years.

**THE NEW OWNERS . . .**

We are pleased to announce the new owners—Alf and Norm Tract—who are taking over December 1, 1965. We sincerely trust that you will patronize them as faithfully as you did us.

**BYRNES GARAGE**

—BRIAN—

Whonnock, B.C.

## SCOURING SHORES SEEKING CLUES ABOUT OUR HISTORY

The Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows News  
5 February 1986, Cary Rodin.

FOR MORE than two decades Brian and Isabel Byrnes have been scouring the shores of the Fraser River from Pitt Meadows to Hope, searching for clues about the people who inhabited its ancient banks.

Brian, a retired service station owner, picked up a simple yet ingenious primitive hand tool from the couple's collection of Indian artifacts. The stone hammer, a smooth cylinder carefully carved about 2,800 years ago, is just one sample of the numerous treasures that he and his wife have discovered during their 20 years of archaeological hikes.

"Just about every second home around here had those things for doorstops," Brian chuckled of the old, yet abundant hammers.

The majority of the Byrneses' collection of about 2,000 historical items were collected while strolling along the river. Digging, the couple stressed, is an amateur archaeological faux pas.

"It's like tearing pages out of a book as you read it, Brian said. Digging is also illegal, unless the archaeologists have government approval, which is generally reserved for universities, Isabel said, adding that they have worked on about 18 approved digs.

For their own explorations, the Byrnes rely upon nature's shovel to unearth the treasures of past civilizations. "The river is our excavator," Brian said, explaining that the water's annual tides gradually erode the banks, re-

vealing new artifacts to careful observers.

Although the Byrneses are self-taught experts on local native Indian history, they have rarely taken their expeditions to reserves, preferring to honour the inhabitants' privacy.

Discovering items that are many centuries old is an exciting sensation, Isabel said. "It's quite a thing to stand where someone stood two or three thousand years ago," agreed Brian. He drew a set of trade beads from his well-secured collection. "These could have been from the Hudson Bay Company or Captain Cooke or whatever."

Perhaps one of the Byrneses' most dramatic art forms is the Shaman's rattle, used by Indians to win favor with the spirits. "We sometimes point it to the legislature in Victoria, but it doesn't seem to do much good," Brian laughed.

Pointing to a selection of projectile points gathered at a site in Whonnock, Brian explained that many were carved long before the bow and arrow were even invented. "That's from a site that has been in business long before the pyramids in Egypt."

Archaeology started as a way for the long-time Whonnock residents to break free from the rigors of work and enjoy a walk along the river's bank. But the Byrneses' fascination with history has blossomed to the point where they now document private collections for the [Archaeological Society of British Columbia].



News photo by Craig Hodges

*Brian and Isabel Byrnes have collected native Indian artifacts along the banks of the Fraser River for more than 20 years. Among their impressive collection of 2,000 artifacts are these hand-held hammers, approximately 1,200 and 2,800 years old respectively. The Byrnes have recently contributed their find from a nearby site to the Maple Ridge Museum, which is celebrating Heritage Week later this month.*

Isabel's interest in local history comes naturally. She taught school in Whonnock for 30 years, but her roots trace to when her grandfather homesteaded there in the late 1800s.

Encouraged by the growth of local museums during the past few years, the local couple is optimistic about the public's appreciation for history.

"The interest of the public is increasing greatly," Brian said. "All heritage projects are extremely valuable... The thought that is left behind leaves something. Just like the waves up on a beach, something is left behind."

To bolster the Maple Ridge

Museum's treasures, Brian and Isabel recently donated about 40 artifacts from a site they examined near Kanaka Creek. The donation was a timely one, said museum curator Sheila Nickols, adding that the theme of Heritage Day this February 22 is native history.

## A HAND IN HISTORY

Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows News  
23 January 2000, Karin Mark.

WHONNOCK'S Brian Byrnes spent years helping preserve the past.

Brian Byrnes has held history in his hands.

He has held sandstone arrowheads ground smooth and sharp thousands of years ago in preparation for a hunt. He has held obsidian knives whose ends had once been bound with bark to protect their users' hands.

He has held woven baskets that carried infants on the backs of their mothers in the days when the words First Nation had no meaning.

Now age 85, Byrnes no longer spends hours on his knees sifting through the dirt for artifacts. His hands are now busy keeping up his old house, feeding wood into his old-fashioned stove, and thumbing through his library of archaeological records and books.

But he still retains a sense of history and place gained from years of archaeological work around the Lower Mainland. "Everybody had a sense of doing something important," he said. "It was history that was going to be lost if we didn't do something about it."



*Brian and Isabel Byrnes admiring an artifact they found (11 april 1975).*

Byrnes makes coffee for a visitor, his hands gently pouring the steaming brown liquid into delicate cups and saucers. He also sets out a tray of sweets—a good host, perhaps made so by his wife Isabel's passing two years ago. His third offering is conversation.

Archaeology is a topic Byrnes never exhausts, one that has consumed him since a chance discovery of an arrowhead along a local riverbank in the 1940s. He and Isabel had always shared an interest in history, both Old World and West Coast. To actually hold a piece of the past in their hands brought to life everything they had gleaned from books and other sources. "We were hooked."

That first find launched regular forays to local rivers—the Fraser, Pitt and Stave, to name a few—to watch for gifts left behind by erosion. "We'd never dig for them, but we did walk along the riverbanks. The bank would collapse and the fine stuff would wash away and leave arrowheads."

Everything found was numbered, photographed and recorded. Using this information, the couple would chart sites likely occupied by humans thousands of years ago.

The pursuit absorbed many weekends during their working days—he was a mechanic running three garages, she taught at Whonnock elementary for 30 years. It grew to a full-time job after their retirement in the mid-1960s.

By that time they had joined the Archaeological Society of B.C., then a fledgling organization, and later helped found the Fraser Valley chapter.

Willing to educate themselves and work hard, the Byrneses soon became sought-after participants on the many digs the society initiated in the 1960s and 1970s. They took part in about 18 major digs, some for research purposes, but most intended to salvage artifacts in areas destined for buildings or roads.

Byrnes remembers the first: the site of the St. Mungo Cannery, at what is today the southern foot of the Alex Fraser Bridge. He and Isabel dug down eight to nine feet and found a sea beach some 12 miles from the current mouth of the Fraser River.

Gems of information surface throughout a conversation with Byrnes. Jade was commonly used to make pointed implements, he said. "It's a very tough rock and it holds an edge neatly. It takes a lot of grinding, but you get your wife to do it," he adds, his face cracking into a smile.

Talking of those happy days rekindles memories of the camaraderie that prevailed during the digs, the feeling of working towards a common goal.

The couple would be assigned a spot that could be as small as a metre square. They would dig straight down until they were either told to stop or came across layer after layer of sterile material.

The work was painstaking. Each layer of dirt was systematically removed, then screened, each artifact sketched. Everything was documented.

Byrnes remembers coming across simple rocks and noting, "possible unused stone."

If they were lucky, they would remove a vertical foot of material in a day's dig.

"The theory was if you were told to put it all back when you were done, you could," he said. "You are the investigator, and it can only be found once, so you have to do it carefully."

Volunteers were widely used in those days. The couple declined money for expenses, other than film and developing. They also provided their own tools—trow-

els, whisk and dustpan, various measuring instruments. "We felt we were privileged to be allowed to do this. It was much better than reading it in a book."

Working hard together for long hours would quickly break down any restraint between strangers. Byrnes recalled one hot summer dig that led to a skinny dip in a nearby lake. As it happened, a train carrying the head of CP Rail passed by on the adjacent tracks. "All the women were waving as the train crept slowly by," he chuckled.

The couple would arrive home at the end of the day for a hot bath and meal, "leaving a sandbar in the bathtub." Sometimes, an unwelcome surprise would greet them back at the dig the next morning. "Pot hunters would show up at night. You would find your careful measurements all gone."

The river walks continued throughout the years. Spurred by their own finds, the couple started logging the private collections of people they knew. When the project was adopted by the Archaeological Society, they were assigned to a team covering the area from the Pitt River to Hope.

"You're never finished. There was always more to do. Someone digs a well and finds something," said Byrnes, who acted as archaeological adviser for the Mission Heritage Society for about a dozen years. "I feel they'll be digging this stuff up for 200 to 300 years."

The couple stopped attending digs in the 1980s, partly because volunteers were being phased out, partly because of Isabel's health. But their interest in archaeology never waned, and

Byrnes is still called upon to this day as a resource. He also remains a member of the Archaeological Society, of which Whonnock's Helmi Braches is president.

His worry now is that while more and more development is certain to occur on aboriginal sites, digs are less frequent because the exclusion of volunteer archaeologists has drastically increased their expense.

"There's so much to be found," he said. "It's history that can't be repeated. It's our one shot at it."

*NOTE: What Brian and Isabel did decades ago was perfectly legal then. Today it is unlawful even to go out looking for artifacts without a permit from Victoria.*

## LIGHT TABLE

*Brian Byrnes demonstrating the use of one of the light tables he designed and built for the Archaeological Society of British Columbia for the Private Collections Project described on the next page. In later years Brian used this light table to reproduce hundreds of photographs for himself and others.*



## PRIVATE COLLECTIONS PROJECT

*Written by Brian Byrnes and read by Viola Gleig to the June 1981 meeting of the Chilliwack Historical Society.*

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL Society of B.C. is an organization of professionals and amateurs whose interest is the preservation of the history of the native people.

There are three chapters: Vancouver, Victoria and Abbotsford. Volunteers from the ASBC have assisted at many salvage digs sponsored by UBC, SFU, Vancouver Museum and Douglas and Vancouver community colleges.

ASBC has also been responsible for several pieces of legislation aimed at cleaning up the archaeological scene: (1) Industry and Government are now legally responsible for preserving and/or excavating threatened sites. (2) Export of artifacts is now illegal. (3) Severe penalties for vandalizing or defacing any petroglyph, pictograph or burial site. (4) Several enactments that have not been proclaimed yet.

One little known project of the ASBC is the recording of Indian artifacts held in private collections. Over the years there have been devastating losses to the heritage of BC as old settlers' and pioneers' collections have been scattered or taken to the dump.

The hardest part of this project comes first: locating collections. This is done by word of mouth and advertising at local level. The owner's consent must be given and if not

given they are not bothered further.

The mechanics of recording are fairly simply, a SLR 35 mm camera with macro lens is mounted on a light table with appropriate side lighting.

Up to 16 to 18 artifacts are arranged, numbered and photographed on a 16"-x-16" glass sheet. This glass sheet is then placed in front of the writing team and another glass sheet is readied, Continuous production is maintained and team work is essential.

The recording team identifies each artifact, identifies the material (stone, wood, bone, etc.), measures in three dimensions (in centimetres) and notes its provenance and condition.

One photo—one data sheet and they both have the same number which identifies the owner and the recording team as well as the catalogue number.

The negatives, 3"-x-5" black and white prints and data sheets are sent to the Museum of Anthropology at UBC who not only provide storage but provide a strictly limited access for scholastic research. A card-sort system has been set up for instant retrieval of data.

ASBC funds and some years private grants are used to cover cost of films, developing and printing and postage—all else is voluntary. There are three teams in various stages of activity, the Upper Fraser Valley team is the most active, and

their area is from the Pitt River to Hope—sometimes beyond. To date this team has recorded 43 collections which is 793 photos and sheets and 7268 artifacts (to April 1981).

It is interesting to note that many of these collections are in the Abbotsford–Chilliwack area.

The visiting team can often identify artifacts for owners and demonstrate or explain their use by the native people. We can also reassure the owners of the legitimacy of their ownership and encourage further collecting by legitimate means.

There is no limit to size of collections, some have taken three or more days, and small collections are often gathered together and done at one "sitting."

It should be stressed that there is a degree of confidentiality involved and details of collections are never discussed publicly by the team.

Apart from the fun of working on a project of this nature there are other rewards for the team. One is the pleasure derived from seeing and handling so many privately owned artifacts. The other bonus is meeting so many pleasant people and many warm and lasting friendships have resulted.

As long as people live in the Fraser Valley, artifacts will appear, and only a program such as outlined will ensure that more than just a memory remains.

## REMAINS OF A FISHING WEIR IN MISSION

*Brian Byrnes was a member of the Mission Heritage Advisory Committee during its lifetime. He went out of his way to try and save an interesting archaeological feature and wrote the following for presentation at the Mission Heritage Advisory Committee meeting on 6 June 1989.*

THE PURPOSE of this meeting is to become familiar with and to discuss an archaeological site.

This site is located on the right bank of the Fraser River.... It is on a flat, poorly drained, treeless area of about 70 acres that is divided into two privately owned parcels and is zoned industrial....

The midden is bisected by the fence separating the two properties which makes a most convenient reference point for measuring etc. The midden seems to be in the shape of a flattened oval, 390' long, 50' wide (maximum), not counting the 15' bank and the beach. Over many years much of the midden has collapsed into the river leaving a maximum area of a third of an acre.

The midden consists of a black cultural layer composed of organic debris, fire-cracked rock and occasional artifacts. This layer is 4" to 8" thick and is overlaid by 18" to 24" of flood plain alluvial deposit probably from freshets of 1894, 1882, 1876, etc. Aerial photos of 1984 show the whole area flooded.

A very unusual and interesting feature is the existence of the remains of a fishing weir

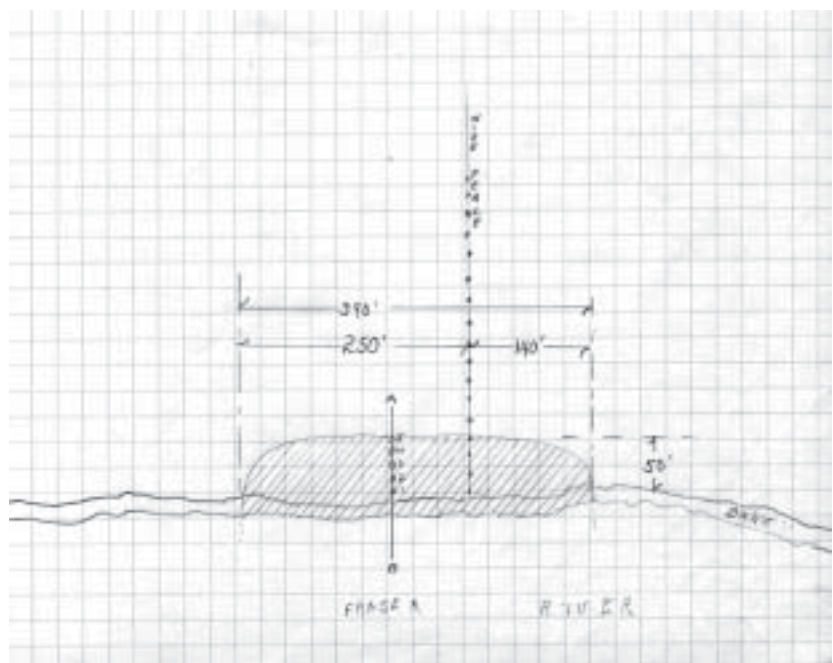
that extends up the beach for nearly 200' in front of and parallel to the midden. The feature consists of the remains of hundreds of stakes, 1" to 4" diameter, driven in random rows. If it followed the pattern of other reconstructed weirs the stakes would be about shoulder high and laced with small branches for the tidal entrapment of migrating (anadromous) fish. All that is left are the decayed stubs of stakes that are only visible in low water, low tide conditions.

Apart from the fishing weir remains, the rest of the site seems to be an average fishing camp used seasonally only, and over the centuries leaving us with a heritage site that merits all the care and protection we are able to give.



*Isabel Byrnes on the beach of the Fraser looking at rows of stumps—the remains of an ancient fishing weir.*

*Elsewhere Brian Byrnes notes: "Mayor Weremchuk, who represented Council at this meeting, assured us that this report and their discussion would be held in an 'in camera' meeting." However, Brian's and the committee's efforts to protect the site could not stop industrial development, which virtually destroyed the site.*





## ALL RED ROUTE



*Draft letter by Brian Byrnes to Mr. and Mrs Hicks, 1990.*

I OBTAINED your address from Ron Welwood at Selkirk College who is deeply interested in the 1912 auto trip across Canada.

I am taking the liberty of enclosing some copies of an old family picture which has been in our house since 1912. Left to right F.V. [Jack] Haney, T.W. Wilby, E. Wise, E. Gilley, and Ted Eastman, (my mother's brother), the last two representing the BC Automobile Association. The bridge is at Vedder crossing first outside Chilliwack.

When I was a kid I asked my mother who those people were

and she said Ted told her that the man sitting on the bridge railing [Haney] was the real leader.

After reading Ron Welwood's article in the *BC Historical News* on the "Wilby Hoax" I sent him the same photo as enclosed and some other data which he sent on to Ardin Phair of St. Catherine Historical Museum. Ardin is writing an article on the 1912 trip and I wonder if it is scheduled for the August [1990] issue of *The Beaver*.

Let me underline there is no obligation. Copying old historical photos is a hobby and I didn't feel right having a picture of your Dad that you perhaps don't have. If you want

any copies I have all negatives filed, or if you wish to see the original, call in.

*Mrs. Hicks, Jack Haney's daughter lived in Surrey at that time. It was Jack Haney, not Wilby, who drove the REO across Canada. Wilby took all the glory.*

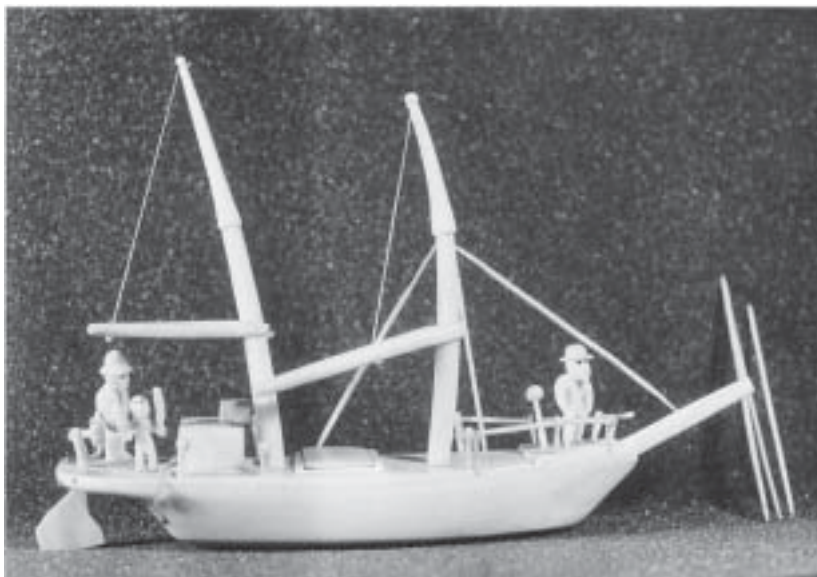
*In another letter Brian writes: "Ted Eastman was my mother's younger brother and was a live wire in New Westminster. He helped start the Native Sons of BC, several service clubs, the BC Automobile Association."*



## MRS. O'KELLY & THE IVORY SHIP MODEL

*Draft letter by Brian Byrnes to the HBCo archives in Winnipeg, undated.*

THIS IS ABOUT an ivory ship model given to us long ago by a Mrs. T.P. O'Kelly (Gladys). As we remember she accompanied her husband who was sent by HBCo to locate (?) stake out (?) supervise (?) watch (?) construction of a trading post at Coronation Gulf in the 1920s. The Natives told of a previous trader (explorer?) and soon produced the model of ship and crew. The only non-ivory parts are a deck rail and the two arm stays [made of] cotton thread. The captain's beard has a hole indicating a [missing] pipe or whistle. I might have the masts transposed but they fit better as is. There is also a guardrail missing at the stern similar to the front. Mrs. O'Kelly gave us some of her Indian and arctic things: oil



lamp, ulu, beadwork, porcupine quilt belt, etc. Mrs. O'Kelly lost her husband soon after and somehow raised and fully educated their two boys. Due to her arctic experience she spent a year cooking on a ship that left from this coast and was iced in in the Behring Str. Then she

ran a tearoom in Vancouver. She was a great person and was the personification of a Victorian lady: boater hat, lace collar, jabot et al. (Morris Minor convertible). She said she wrote several articles in the 1930s for *The Beaver*.

## EXAMPLES OF BRIAN'S RANDOM NOTES

— 1864. Indian population of Whonnock 33. (Sgt. MColl R.E.)

— Jan. 1884 first train from Yale to Port Moody; June 1884 first train from Lytton to Port Moody. Head of navigation changed from Yale to Port Hammond at this time—for rail and heavy CPR supplies.

— Robert Robertson farmed 1876-1887. Lot 433 Whonnock (26912 River Road). Received Crown Grant August 7, 1884.

— Rolley moved from Rolley Lake to Fanchers early 1897.

— Water-powered mill on West bank of Whonnock Creek above

Whonnock Creek. Overshot wheel 12 ft ca. handmade wooden gears geared up to hi-speed planer heads making a siding with V edges >>>> 6 inches ca. Roof gone in 1923? when my brother and I saw it but paddle wheel worked Ted Lee told me. It was operated by Mr. Smerchack.

— R.C. Church built on Indian Reserve in 1888 with lumber sawn by Henry West at West Creek.

— Haw T'aa = thanks, Chinn(e)y=GFA, Nonn(e)y=

GMO, Nits="may your spirit not fly out of your body" (after a sneeze). Unpronounceable word for toad: "crab of the forest"

— Basic divisions are meridian, next ranges, next townships at 36 sections, next sections at 1 mile square, next quarter sections (NE, SW, etc.); next districts lots (DL 433 etc.) next lots No. 8 of 433 etc. Sections in townships are numbered from bottom right 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. No. 7 left to right starting above 6 and so on up to Section 36.

## DESCENDANTS OF JAMES AND FANNY ROLLEY

*Draft letter by Brian Byrnes to Joan and Ken Rolley, undated.*

WHAT a nice surprise to hear from more Rolleys. Dorothy Green warned us.

James Rolley arrived in New Westminster BC (a river-sea port) where he met Fanny Elizabeth Jones (maiden name unknown) who had come out from somewhere in Ontario where she lost her new husband with flu. She took a tailoring course and bought a second-hand sewing machine and came west on one of the first CPR trains.

Fanny and James married August 24, 1889 at New Westminster and homesteaded at a beautiful little lake—now Rolley Lake park. They were totally isolated at the end of a 6-mile trail through the bush. So when [daughter] Ruth became of school age they left and came to Whonnock, a settlement on the Fraser River. Jim worked for the CPR inspecting and maintaining water tanks from the Rocky Mountains to the coast. At Whonnock a son Fred was born.

They returned to the lake for holidays—they even took a cow up the 6 mile trail. Fanny brought the sewing machine and soon was busy “mending up” the community of Whonnock—we have the machine & it still sews O.K.

James died on May 26, 1913 and is buried in New Westminster.

Son Fred married Vera Showler and they had a daugh-



ter Patricia. Ruth married Hector Ferguson, son of an early settler, and lived in Haney. They had a son, Rolley Hector Ferguson, and a daughter Margaret Isabel (b 1913). Both became school teachers. Rolley died three year ago and Isabel died September 13 [1997] of this year after a long time in a care unit where I fed her lunch every day. No children. I married Rolley's sister 58 years ago and Rolley married my sister Betty in Wartime and had two daughters. We have little data on James's birthplace and growing up area. I remember his daughter Ruth said he had an extremely broad accent which she blamed on Manchester.

Today, going through old photos I found an envelope marked Hadfield, Glossop near Manchester, Lancashire. 9 pictures

4" x 6". Another envelope marked Toronto, Winnipeg has 12 2½ x 4 pictures. No identification of any and all on thick cardboard. I have a camera set up and I like to copy old faded photos as a hobby, so as soon as I get over the loss of Isabel I will copy the photos into a mailable size, and get them to you and if you get this far you can have the originals.

The Rolleys were well regarded. James was a municipal councillor for years and it might please you to know there is a Rolley Lake, Rolley Provincial Park, Rolley Crescent and Rolley Avenue. Please forgive the stationery and handwriting. I am 82 and have arthritis in my thumb (of all places). And congratulations being related to Dorothy Green, one of the nicest people of this world.

## BRIAN'S DIVERSION

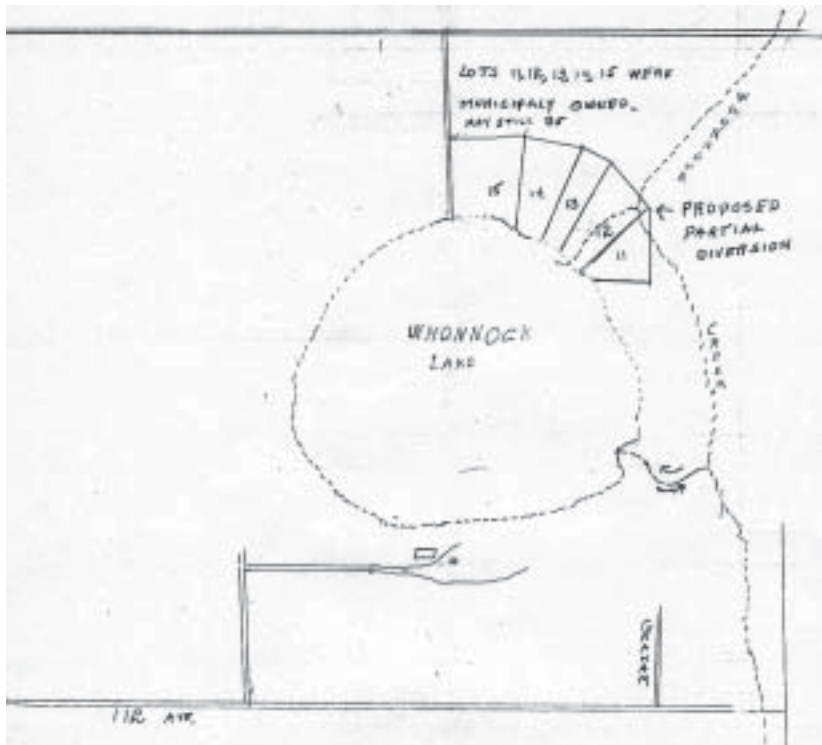
When water levels at Whonnock Lake were dangerously low in 1999 caused by intervention with the work done by beavers Brian suggested to divert part of the water from the Whonnock Creek into the lake through Lot 12. He provided a sketch map with the following comments:

PROPOSED diversion would create a rotary swirling current in the lake which would freshen the water and achieve a better ph balance which in turn would inhibit peat encroachment which would greatly extend the life expectancy of our lake. Perhaps consideration should be given to construction of a permanent dam in the present outlet—maybe using large concrete retaining-wall blocks with an adjustable gate to “fine tune” lake levels.



Charles Miller

Beaver dam at Whonnock Lake, 1918.



Brian's plan was ignored but it may still catch attention when the levels drop to dangerous levels once more.

## SAMPSON

Brian Byrnes put together a database of paddle wheelers and an impressive collection of photographs he copied from every possible source. He made many notes such as the following one:

SAMPSON #1 built in Victoria by W.B. Bolens, 1883. Scrapped 1908, remains in Gillies Quarry, Pitt River. (J.S.).  
 Sampson #2 built in Victoria 1905, replaced in 1914 by Sampson #3, built by Coquitlam Ship Building Co., replaced in 1924 by Sampson #4 built by Coquitlam Ship Building Co., replaced in 1937 by Sampson #5 built by Star Shipyard, New Westminster, gutted by fire in 1954. Replaced by *Essington* till it was rebuilt in 1960. Taken out of service on October 31, 1980. Only #5 had pressure-creosoted hull.

## THOUGHTLESS

*Draft letter by Brian Byrnes, to the Gazette, 22 January 1991.*

IN YOUR sporting column in the *Gazette*, January 20, 1991, you used the phrase “The snow is two squaws deep.”

The use of this cruel and thoughtless term, apart from searing the sensibilities of your readers, will bring nothing but discredit on your organization.

For over ten-thousand years the Indian people lived in harmony with their environment and at the end handed it over, game-filled and undamaged and unpolluted.

Until you and I can do as well, it behooves us to treat both the gift and the giver with greater respect and appreciation.

## NORRIS AND NORAH MCKAY



*Draft letter by Brian Byrnes to Linda Phinney, Rivers, Manitoba, 25 January 1988.*

I HOPE you don't mind my intruding, but Lila Timmins, our most considerate postmaster, said you were looking for information on a relative, Mrs. N.M. McKay (Norah Halpin). I knew Mrs. Halpin and Norah when I was young and they were close neighbours. Norris McKay (rhyme with pie not hay) was a crusty bachelor who farmed nearby; a great back piper. We were happy that two lonely people found each other.

They had about 15 acres of farm and like the rest of us worked hard and had little money to spare, but they seemed content. After many years they sold the farm and lived in a nearby town—Haney—where they eventually died.

I have a small snapshot [above] that I copied for you. The original snap is old and a little misty. Norah wears rimless glasses which accounts for the apparent lump on her nose. As I recall she had a beautiful complexion.

I am retired and one of my hobbies is copying historic photos—so do not feel obligated in any way as I am sure you have done things for people and will do it again. If there is anything more you would like to know just ask & I will do my best.

*A reply to this letter mentions that Mrs. McKay (Norah Halpin) was adopted by the Halpins in 1902 at age 10. She was born Mary Anne Lyttle, one of ten children of farmer Albert Lyttle and Annie McDonald, who died in 1902. H.J. Halpin died in Brandon in 1904 and Mrs. Halpin died in 1947.*

## A SHORT HISTORY OF WHONNOCK POST OFFICE

Brian Byrnes's "Short History of Whonnock Postoffice," was written in 1988, and used in 1995 by postmaster Lila Timmins to put together a leaflet with the same title, giving credit to Brian Byrnes where due.

Brian wrote these notes at a time when rural post offices were closed everywhere. Rural Dignity of Canada, an action group, tried to stop the closures. Their slogan was: "Save Our Small Post Offices." In their 1988 calendar we find two quotations from Brian's "Short History."

*In February: "The one unchanging feature of the dismal postal scenario has been the more than excellent sustained service offered by the rural post offices and staff. Their service can be truly described as the mortar that bonds communities together."*

*In October: "In 1920 Glen Valley received its mail through the Whonnock post office; mail was rowed across the Fraser River every weekday morning. Herb Cain of Glen Valley deserves a place in post office history as he never missed a day (an unfailing performance of this chore) he never missed a trip for years and years. I earned many quarter (35¢ in ice) rowing the mail across."*

*NOTE: R.S. Whiting was appointed post master in 1907. We know now that the fire in the Whonnock Store occurred on 14 March of 1916 (not in 1911). The new Whonnock post office seems to have been ready a few weeks later. See Traces, Spring 2001. "Mr Methot and the burning of the Whonnock Store."*



WHONNOCK is a community near the eastern end of the Municipality of Maple Ridge. The area is about 5,900 acres; the estimated population is a minimum of 1,700.

Most early businesses were located near the river and later near the CPR [station]. One of the first of these was York's store located opposite "CPR Mile 96"—a general store, small hotel, transship and freight warehouse, steamer landing, telegraph office, post office and, of course, community news and information centre.

The post office was established August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1885 and the first postmaster was Noble Oliver.

York's store burnt in 1911 [1916, see note in left column] and the post office was located temporarily in the CPR station. A new post office was built at the present post office location, 26915 River Road. It was rebuilt in 1928 and again in 1932. A wing was added in the 1940s to facilitate sorting and expediting Rural Route mail. Whon-

nock's Rural Route started half a mile from the post office and served a large area—at first 18¾ miles.

Haney post office changed its name to Maple Ridge post office in the 1970s and to increase its volume it engineered the demise of Ruskin post office and the takeover of Ruskin and Whonnock rural routes, with a considerable increase in personnel.

For over 100 years the Whonnock post office and land have been owned by the current postmaster. This could be one of the reasons why Whonnock people have enjoyed such exceptional caring service.

In general post office costs have spiralled outrageously and service has deteriorated to a shameful degree; however the one unchanging feature has been the more than excellent service offered by rural post offices and staff. Their service can be truly described as some of the mortar that binds communities together.

In the late 1800s to early 1900s Fort Langley received its mail through the Whonnock post office. Glen Valley had its mail service through the Whonnock post office until the 1930s. The Glen Valley post office was in a general store at the corner of Jackman Road (272<sup>nd</sup> street) and River Road. Mail was rowed over every weekday morning after being sorted in the Whonnock post office. This writer [Brian Byrnes] earned many a quarter—35¢ in ice—rowing mail over the Fraser. Herb Cain of Glen Valley deserves a place in post office history for his un-failing performance of this chore—over many years he never missed.

A couple of quotes from John Williamson's diary while working in York's store [the Whonnock Store].

"August 2 [1897]— Fine



BC Archives C-01944

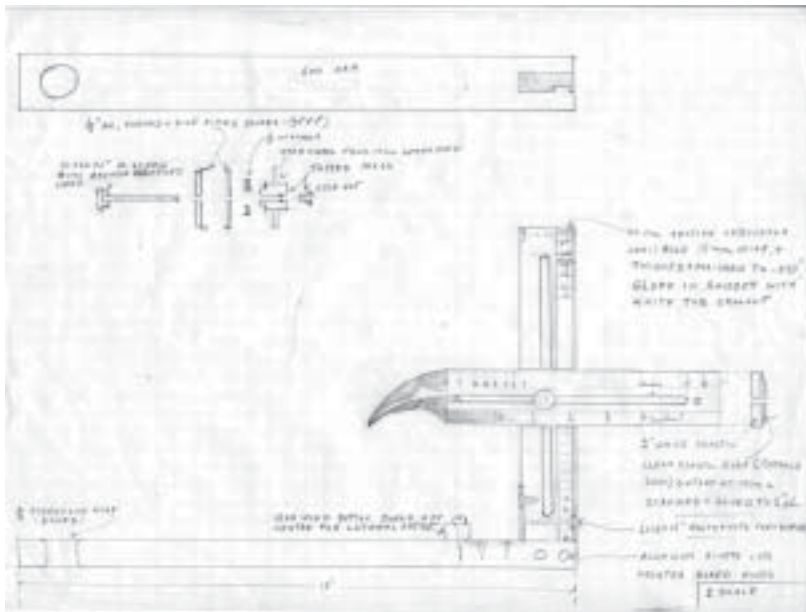
*The photo on the previous page (1930s?) shows the post office on the place where it was built in 1916, after a fire destroyed the old Whonnock Store (location now under the Lougheed Highway). Note the narrow space between the post office and Showler's store built in 1919/1920.*

*A 1950s photo, above, shows the post office as it was replaced in 1930s, and where we know it today. It was moved to the west side of the lot. Byrnes residence in the background.*

weather. Mr. Hutchinson and four men putting in a mail catching post opposite the store door." "August 26 [1897] – Very warm – 80° – Business is fair,

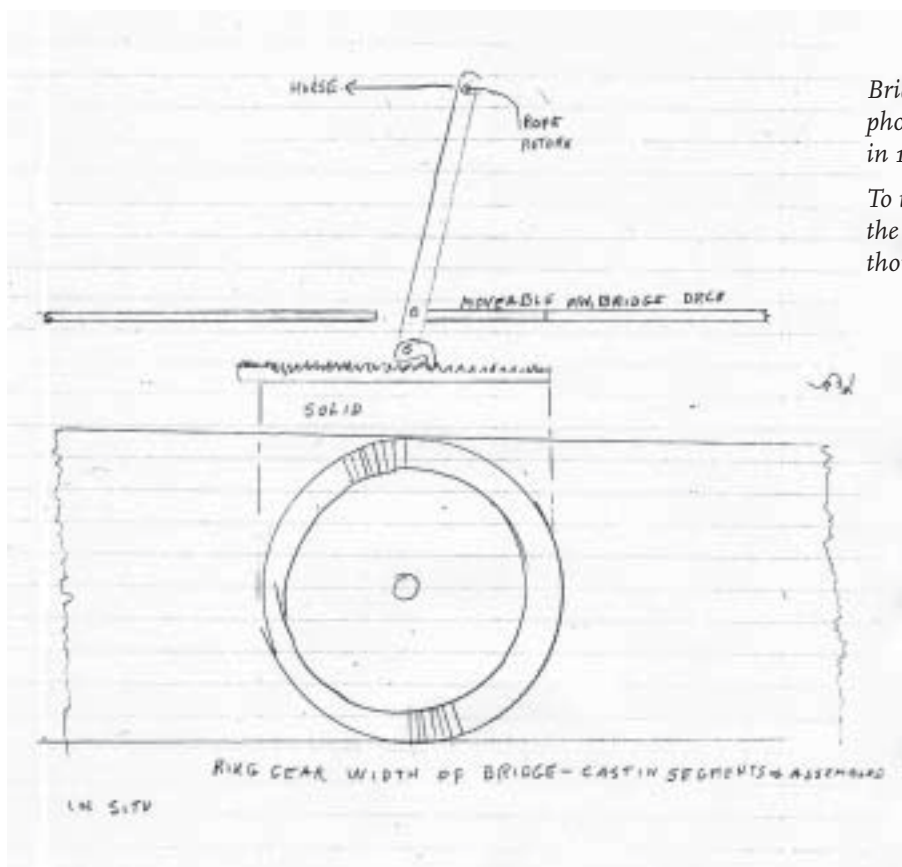
Mr. Fletcher, the post office inspector, was here today, everything about the post office was all right. No. 2 missed the mailbag today...."

## TOOL MAKER



*Haida artist Robert Davidson, a printmaker and carver, lived and worked in Whonnock for many years, where he produced some great totempoles. He was a friend of the Byrneses. Brian Byrnes designed and made special measuring tools for Robert and his brother Reg Davidson for use in their work. This is one example of Brian's craft.*

## DRAW BRIDGE PUZZLE



Brian Byrnes was intrigued by this photo of the draw bridge in Mission in 1907. How could this work?

To the left is a drawing he made of the mechanism of this bridge as he thought it would have been.



## BOOKMOBILE

Maple Ridge News, 21 July 1991.  
Jina You.

AFTER using the friendly services of the Fraser Valley Regional Library's mobile service for decades, Whonnock residents don't want to see it go.

For almost 60 years Brian Byrnes has been a faithful user of the bookmobile that stops at Whonnock post office near his house every three weeks.

In December, the 76-year-old and other residents who use the service will have to drive to their community library to check out books as a result of Fraser Valley Regional Library's decision to shelve the regional bookmobile service.

And that has Byrnes steamed: "I felt like I was kicked in the stomach. I was devastated," Byrnes says.

The decision to cancel the service was made after a survey of bookmobile users earlier this year found that 98 per cent of them made regular visits to communities that have branch library services.

"That was really the clincher - it came across as a convenience rather than a need," said FVRL executive director Gordon Ray,



Fraser Valley Record: Ted Colley



Tisdall

The bookmobile started travelling through Whonnock about 1930. This photo, taken in the 1930s, shows eager readers inspecting the library in front of the post office.

adding the survey also found only about four people per stop used the service.

The savings from North America's longest running library service will be channeled into improved service for seniors in private nursing homes.

But Byrnes says seniors who don't live in a nursing home

and have difficulty getting around end up getting cheated. "A bookmobile saves us going all the way to another library. You make friends with the driver and staff and the selection of books is much better than in a stationary library," says Byrnes, whose tastes run to local history and "technical" books....



News photo by Simone Ponne

## CORRESPONDENCE WITH ELIZABETH HANCOCK

*Elizabeth Hancock produced a column in the News. She and her husband befriended the Byrneses. They visited Brian Byrnes every week during the last months of his life.*

*Draft letter by Brian Byrnes, July 1993, to Elizabeth Hancock .*

I WOULD like to comment on your Archive column of July 4 [1993], where it states "Whonnock is a very small rural area." It is still small due to shrinking from the amorous glances and fetid embrace of real estate agents and developers. I thought that Eric Blois bought a Plymouth ... and I did not shoot a cougar on Park Road!

On my way to work at Stave Lake I surprised a cougar in the middle of the unpaved Dewdney Trunk Road near the junction of Parker Road where the Iron Mountain Store is now. The female cougar had a bobcat (lynx) kitten in its mouth. She dropped the kitten and bounded off. I put the kitten in my shirt front and that night took it home and built a large pen where it grew up till it was big enough to fend for itself. Then I released it.

The gamewarden dogs and some local heroes from Haney tracked the cougar to a bobcat den on Iron Mountain where the cougar had killed the bobcat family; all but one which she was taking home to her own kittens to practice on. The reason of this diatribe is that I dislike the impression that we should kill any animal we see. Also it is pleasing to note that modern journalism had a long and less than exacting ancestry.

*Brian Byrnes to Elizabeth Hancock February 17, 1994. The letter was published in the Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows News, 2 March 1994.*

YOUR "From the Archives" of February 13 [1994] [referring to] one of the largest logs, brought back memories and I thought these two pictures might be of interest to you. [see next page]

The log came from the Bell Road area of Stave Falls and came from a tree known in some circles as a "school-marm."

The truck is a 500 Mack and the driver was Charles "Granny" Kilborne of Haney. Standing on

the trailer reach is Robert Hopper, a beloved citizen of Ruskin and an employee of our garage. I used the side view picture on our calendar of 1995 and had so many out-of-province requests for copies that I had another 200 printed and got rid of all but two.

I often hope that lumber from the great log was used in furnishing homes that are still used and loved and have not suffered the fate of our garage.

Keep up the good work. Maple Ridge area has a great history.

### Thank you for keeping our local history alive

**Editor, The News:**

We enjoyed Elizabeth Hancock's recent historical article ('Daddy Dunn' was first Presbyterian minister, *The News*, Oct. 31) and feel her articles are an essential part of community growth. Here are a few notes about Alexander Dunn's life.

Dunn arrived in Victoria on Aug. 31, 1875 and was sent to the parish of Langley. He married Miss Annie Karn of Ontario on Nov. 24, 1882. The Scottish Presbyterian Church reorganized into the Canadian Presbyterian Church and sent Dunn to Alberni on March 15, 1886.

On March 30, 1889 he returned to Langley parish and settled in Whonnock at what is now 27067 River Road. Due to "ill health in the family" he moved to New

Westminster in 1913.

We feel much of the credit for his accomplishments should go to his wife and also to his faithful coarsman who water-taxed him on all his rounds. His name was Robert Robertson, and he settled in Whonnock in 1860, which makes him either the first or second settler in Maple Ridge.

Robertson was a Royal Engineer who, while he squatted on D.L. 433 in 1860, did not get full title until 1883.

His house was bulldozed in the 1940s and would have had a modern address of 26904 River Road, exactly across River Road from my address.

We hope you continue to stir our historical pot.

**Brian Byrnes  
Whonnock**

*Maple Ridge - Pitt Meadows News 29 December 1993 . We know now that Whonnock's Robert Robertson was never a Royal Engineer. He was contracted as labourer for the Hudson's Bay Company and worked in the north before settling in Whonnock.*



"A huge Douglas fir log measuring 10 feet 6 inches in diameter was hauled from the woods near Stave Lake by Gold Standard Logging Co. At 28 feet long, the log was said to contain 12,500 board-feet of lumber. Gold Standard owner Gill McNutt said the log would probably be sold to Maple Ridge Lumber Co." (The Gazette, February 19, 1953). Brian reproduced the photo on the left on his 1995 calendar without the name "Gold Standard Logging" on the truck.

## HERITAGE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2001



Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows News  
17 March 2001. Karin Mark.

AWARDS were given out to recognize those who make an effort to preserve local heritage....

Heritage Achievement Award:  
Brian Byrnes

Byrnes was four years old when he moved to Whonnock in 1919, making him its longest term resident. Heritage and archaeology have been his passions since

a chance discovery of an arrow-head in the 1940s while out walking with his wife Isabel.

In the next four decades, the couple dedicated countless hours to archaeological digs, preserving artifacts and documenting private collections. The documents have been turned over to the Whonnock Community Association and are stored at Mission Community Archives.

Byrnes has also donated items to the UBC Museum of Anthropology [?].

Byrnes's home has already received a heritage plaque, but Tuesday night's award was his first. He was modest when asked about it Thursday.

"I was awarded one, but I didn't earn it," said Byrnes, 86. "I just lived, that's all."

[...]

## HERITAGE PLAQUE 1999



*Text from the book Heritage Plaque Program, Tenth Anniversary, published by the Maple Ridge Heritage Commission in 2002.*

THIS is one of two neighbouring homes that were constructed as speculative rental houses in 1931 and 1932 by contractors Ralph Daniels and Richard Whiting for Mrs. Winnifred Gordon. This home was used for rental purposes until Mr. and Mrs. Brian Byrnes purchased and moved into it in 1946 [in fact they rented the house in 1941]. The Byrnes family later purchased the neighbouring house in the 1960s and it continues to be used for guest and family accommodation.

These homes are situated on two lots in historic Whonnock Centre and are surrounded by mature shrubs, trees and rhodo-

dendrons, and an extensively landscaped yard, which provides an excellent setting for these heritage dwellings. While these homes have the appearance of sharing one common site, they were built and remain on individual lots.

The homes are typical of homes constructed during that era with gabled roofs, open veranda's and barn shake roof covers. The building materials used during the construction were common at that time, and the original cabinetry, cedar and fir flooring, fir and pine ceilings, windows and fixtures remain within the homes.

These homes and grounds have been beautifully maintained and provide an excellent example of heritage conservation within Whonnock and the District of Maple Ridge.

*This illustration by Henry Blackwell of the Byrnes residence, 26903 River Road, decorates the heritage plaque. The artist presented Brian with the original.*

*Brian, broom in hand, supervising the "veiling" of the Heritage Plaque.*



## CARING FOR THE PAST

*Proposal to distinguish the Byrnes residence with a Heritage Plaque.*  
Fred Braches.

POVERTY marked the lives of many Whonnock youngsters growing up between the two world wars. Not that anyone went hungry, but there was little money to go around. A frugal lifestyle became a deeply ingrained habit; nothing went to waste and no money was spent thoughtlessly. Bent nails were picked up and straightened and kept for possible use. Everything had its value and everything was kept in good condition for as many years as it would last. Parts often lived well beyond that time.

A combination of a frugal lifestyle and respect for the past is perhaps the secret of the survival of Brian and Isabel Byrnes's 70-year-old house in Whonnock. It is in excellent condition and shows almost no changes inside and outside. Outside the two-storey house is surfaced with dark brown cedar. Barn shingles cover the steep roof. Inside the house the natural wood has a warm, honey-brown glow. Most of the walls of the small and cozy ground-floor rooms are lined with vertical, 1-x-12 knotty pine and 1-x-2 battens. There are more small rooms on the second floor. A woodstove is not the sole source of heat for the house but it is sufficient to drive away the chill of rainy days. Older buildings in our community have mostly been restored to previous glory—often only from the outside—but this simple house has just remained the same, thanks to the loving care Brian has given



*In 1999 the Byrnes residence was distinguished with a heritage plaque unveiled by Mayor Carl Durksen during a well-attended ceremony on 15 March 1999. Brian Byrnes awaiting his guests for the ceremony.*

it over a lifetime. His skilled hands seem to be able to do almost anything.

In 1941, Brian and Isabel (then in their late twenties) rented this house on River Road. Brian owned a garage on Lougheed Highway and Isabel taught at Whonnock's school. Their house and the house next door, which now forms part of the property, were built in 1931 to be leased to workers at the sawmill.

The Byrneses became owners of their house in 1946 when they purchased it. [In 1964 they purchased the house next door from brother H.J. (Barney) Byrnes.] They also acquired small lots of adjacent land and assured that the backdrop of the houses is now a magnificent stand of mature trees. In this environment they received countless visitors, sharing warm friendship, their garden, the fish, frogs and turtles and also their knowledge and interests. The Byrnes's house

became also a source and repository of information on the history and prehistory of the area.

In 1997, we sadly had to say farewell to Isabel, but Brian continued to be the gracious host to all who wandered into his house and garden. Many enjoyed that hospitality when the District of Maple Ridge Heritage Advisory Committee, with Mayor Durksen and several council members present, held a heritage plaque ceremony on a sunny Saturday morning in March to recognize Brian's little house as a heritage building in the community. Whonnockians—members of the Whonnock Community Association, neighbours and many friends—joined in the celebration and enjoyed perhaps most of all the tribute to Brian Byrnes, the man who has always cared as much for Whonnock and its past and future as for his own, distinguished home.

## CARING FOR THE FUTURE

*The 1999 awarding of a Heritage Plaque to Brian Byrnes's home was a public recognition of its heritage value, but it did not assure that future owners would respect and preserve the old building. In the spring of 2003, recovering from a serious illness and a hospital stay, Brian expressed concern what would become of his houses and his trees should he pass away. He therefore applied to Mayor and Council of Maple Ridge for Heritage Designation of his properties. Heritage Designation offers protection by a local government through a bylaw for property considered to have heritage value or heritage character. Final approval was received in May. Municipal Heritage Designation properties are also registered in Victoria and Ottawa.*

Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows News  
22 March 2003, Karin Mark.

A WHONNOCK resident hopes to protect the character of his neighbourhood by seeking heritage designation for his properties.

Maple Ridge council is to vote Tuesday night on a bid by Brian Byrnes to protect his two historic houses at 26887 and 26903 River Road and two abutting wooded lots. The heritage designation bylaw is scheduled to receive the first of four readings and be sent to public hearing. [...]

In his letter to the municipality, Byrnes refers to the mature stand of trees on the slope behind his two 1930s buildings. "The area gives this part of Whonnock a pleasing wooded character and I would like to see that landscape preserved if at all possible."

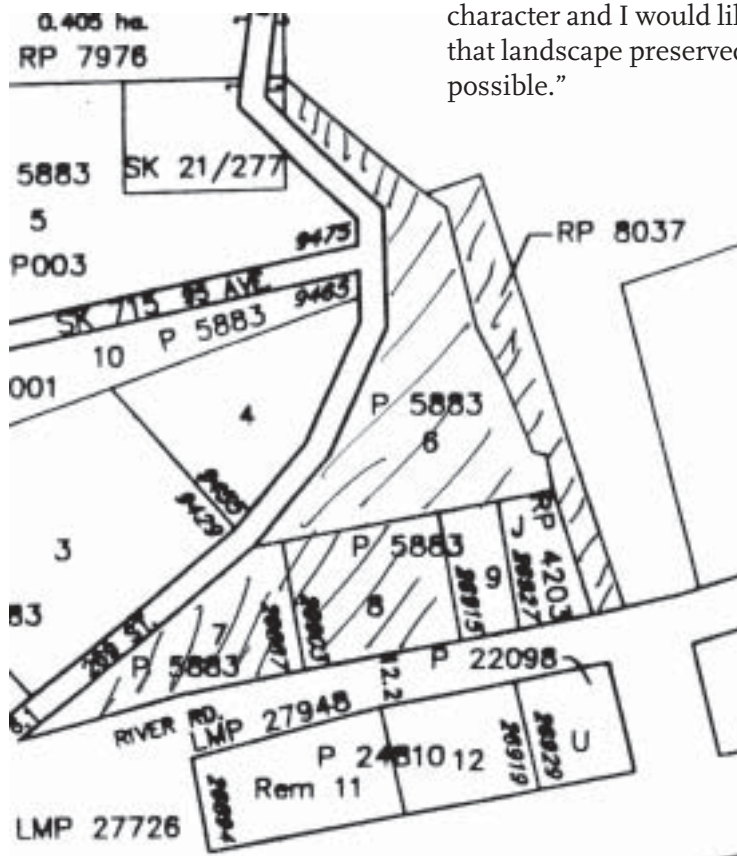
The properties, which wrap around the Whonnock post office, once formed the area's historic centre and were then often referred to as "the front." [...]

Byrnes's plan already has the approval of the Maple Ridge Community Heritage Commission, which has investigated the request. [Text of the background on the opposite page] [...]

The key effect of the designation would be that Byrnes or future owners would be required to maintain the heritage character of the sites. They would need a heritage alteration permit from the municipality to make any changes to the buildings and properties, and thus development could be limited on the wooded sites.

At council's committee meeting Monday, Coun. Craig Speirs said the request shows "good leadership from this gentleman.

"This is one way a private property owner can ensure what they value will carry on to the next generation," Speirs said.



*The Byrnes property—the hatched area on the map is defined by Cooks Creek in the east and by 269th Street in the west. The top of the property, where 269th Street crosses Cooks Creek, lies to the east of Robertson Cemetery (SK21/277).*

*The southern side of the Byrnes property borders on River Road with its two residences, 26887 River Road and 26903 River Road, the post office (P5883 No. 9) and the former Red & White store (RP 4203) sites, owned by Sue Schulze.*

## HERITAGE DESIGNATION 2003

*Background to Community Heritage Commission recommendation to Council for Heritage Designation of the Byrnes properties. Fred Braches.*

THE TWO Byrnes residences are listed in *District of Maple Ridge, The Heritage Resources of Maple Ridge* by Luxton and Associates, 1996, and are identified as “very good examples of consciously rustic style” and representing the continuing development of Whonnock in the 1930s. In 1999 the residence at 26903 River Road was awarded a heritage plaque.

The wooded area behind Mr. Byrnes’s residences is not mentioned in Luxton’s publication, nor is it recorded separately as a heritage resource. Some refer to this stand of trees as “old growth” but no original growth has survived lumbering in the Whonnock-Ruskin area. How-

ever stands of trees dating back to the 1930s are rare in this “rural” area. This is enough reason to recognize this wooded area as a heritage resource and to recommend heritage designation. Another reason is that Mr. Byrnes’s treed area forms a magnificent backdrop for the historical area of Whonnock often referred to in the past as “The Front.”

Both Byrnes residences are on the north side of River Road in the old core of Whonnock, adjacent to the post office—built in the First World War and rebuilt in 1928 and 1932—and the Red & White Store built in 1919. Across the road from the Red & White Store was Graham’s store, built in 1912 or 1913, on the southwest corner of River Road and Wharf Road; on the east side of Wharf Road, facing

River Road, was Luno’s store, which was later moved to Lougheed Highway. Both are long gone. Facing the post office and the Byrnes houses is the old Robertson land, of which Graham’s property was once a part.

The present residences on the south side of River Road have little heritage value; these houses may have to give way when Lougheed Highway will be widened. The view north from the highway will then be on the two Byrnes residences, the post office, and the Red & White store, and hopefully also on the magnificent backdrop of mature trees on the slope of the Byrnes property.

*Below: Gathering with friends in the fall of 1999. Sitting from left to right: Margaret Sweeten, Hazel Dawson, Dorna Pattison. Standing: Fred and Helmi Braches, Brian Byrnes, Neil Smith.*

### 3) HERITAGE DESIGNATION BYLAW NO. 6107-2003

**LEGAL:** Parcel 2, RP 8037 of Parcel “G”, RP 3856, District Lot 433, Group 1, New Westminster District and Lots 6, 7, & 8; all of District Lot 433, Group 1, Plan 5883, New Westminster District

**PURPOSE:** That the above four properties be designated as municipal heritage sites.



Helmi Braches

## FROM THE ALBUMS



*Brian, 1915.*



*Joan, Brian, Barney, Betty, and Pat.*



*Brian, Pat, Betty, Barney, and Joan.*



*Father Henry J. Byrnes and mother Bessie Eastman.*



*1920s. In front of the Byrnes home ("the farm") at the end of 269th Street. Barney, Pat, Betty, Joan, niece Betty Haggan, and Brian.*





1930s. Brian and his 1927 Ford.



During the War years Brian (right) and his father—a First World War veteran—served in the Whonnock Company of the 60th Pacific Coast Militia Rangers.



Rafting on Chehalis Lake. Brian (standing) and Ralph Daniels. Richard Whiting took the photo.



Brian and Isabel married in 1939.



With mother-in-law Ruth Ferguson (nee Rolley).



J. NISHIKAWA



1998



2002

# WHONNOCK NOTES

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

Series Editor: Fred Braches

No. 11

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## It Was a Wonderful Life

Brian & Isabel Byrnes

Fred Braches



In 2002 the Whonnock Community Association received the Heritage Achievement Award from the Maple Ridge Community Heritage Commission for the WCA's contribution towards the conservation and enrichment of heritage in Maple Ridge.

Starting with the "Historical Project" in the summer of 1985 the WCA collects records (documents and photographs) related to the past of Whonnock and Whonnockians. Since 1997 the growing collection, known as Whonnock Archives, has been kept at the Mission Community Archives. The collection is accessible to anyone interested in our past.

The Whonnock Community Association endorses the publication of *Whonnock Notes* and similar publications based on information from the Whonnock Archives, and welcomes any suggestions and actions that would contribute to a better knowledge of the past of our community and its inhabitants.

The Whonnock Community Association asks you to search your files for any documents or photographs relating to Whonnock and Whonnockians. If you don't want to donate the documents or photographs, we would be very happy to just keep a copy or scan in the Whonnock Archives. Give us a chance to preserve the past.

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Fred Braches  
*It Was a Wonderful Life: Brian and Isabel Byrnes*  
Whonnock Notes No.11  
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# WHONNOCK NOTES

1. *Transcripts from the Fraser Valley Record (1908-1912)*  
News about Whonnock in the Mission newspaper
2. *Cemeteries in Whonnock*  
The history of Whonnock's cemeteries  
—includes cemetery records and transcriptions of the grave markers
3. *The Trondheim Congregation*  
Our Norwegian settlers—minutes of the Lutheran Church in Whonnock
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Interviews, notes, and stories dating back to 1913
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7. *Robert Robertson and Tselatsetenate*  
Whonnock's Scottish first settler and his family
8. *A Name Index of the Whonnock Notes Series No. 1-7*  
Compiled by Eleanore Dempster
9. *A Name Index of the Whonnock Community Association  
Historical Project Summer 1985 Records*  
Compiled by Eleanore Dempster
10. *The Family of Catherine & Edward Julius Muench*  
Catherine was the sister of the wife of Robert Robertson

## HOW TO GET COPIES OF WHONNOCK NOTES

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. If you are not planning a visit to the Whonnock post office to get your *Whonnock Notes* please order from Fred Braches, PO Box 130, Whonnock BC V2W 1V9. Phone (604) 462-8942. E-mail: braches@attcanada.ca

Special order: *Records of the Whonnock Community Association's Historical Project, 1985.*



*Brian's fabulous mice. He assured me that the tails would be replaced as and when needed.  
The teeth are made from telephone wire.*