

THE SQUAMISH HISTORIAN

The Newsletter of the Squamish Historical Society

Volume No. 2 Issue No. 3 Winter 2008

News and Notes

The Squamish Historical Society has been very active over the past few months. We have corresponded with a number of associations across the province and have promoted and shared our history with various community organizations. BC is celebrating 150 years as a colony/ province this year and the SHS is planning to hold an event in June.

Our president, Bianca Peters connected with a larger audience when she was interviewed on the CBC *Early Edition* program broadcast from Squamish in February.

She also recently promoted the Sea to Sky Regional Fair on the local Squamish radio station, Mountain FM. As result of the promo, a class from Squamish Elementary School will take part in the fair in North Vancouver and she will be a judge for the second year in a row. Bianca also spoke at a Squamish Chamber of Commerce luncheon about our past and the important role we can play to promote it.

SHS vice-president Leslie Keith's recent PowerPoint presentation held at the Brackendale Art Gallery, entitled *The Squamish Valley before the Highway*, was well received with a standing room only crowd of over 100 people in attendance. This highly entertaining evening underscores our commitment to prompting local history and the high level of interest in the community for information pertaining to the evolution of the Squamish area.

The SHS is now a member of the BC Museum Association with emails arriving daily from heritage and historical groups around the province. We also have a new dedicated history section in the re-vamped Squamish Chief newspaper. And just a reminder: membership dues are coming up in April.



Celebrating Our Past

The following is a condensed version of a recent speech delivered by Bianca Peters to the Squamish Chamber of Commerce:

In the next two years leading up to the 2010 Games an unprecedented number of people will pass through Squamish. They will be well educated and extremely curious about this little corner of the world.

All of our guests, especially those from Europe and Asia, will inquire about the daily experiences of successive waves of pioneers who came to "the shining valley," dating back thousands of years. They will be interested not only in hearing about the events and people who shaped our past, but also in discovering what we've accomplished, and where this community is going.

We will be able to tell them that because of the contributions of our forbears we face one of the most exciting futures of any community in Canada.

The objective of the SHS is to retrieve and showcase our heritage in documents, photo collections, films, and the collective memories of local residents.

Our goal is to provide a road map from the past to the present, from our earliest fishing and foraging economy, to economies based on farming, logging, mining and a variety of

other forms of commerce. We have become a conduit to the Sea-to-Sky region and beyond, and we have long been a Pacific gateway for western Canadian exports. This trade corridor was used for thousands of years by the Coastal and Interior Salish peoples. Since the 1858 Gold Rush, many transportation routes through Squamish have been undertaken.

We have evolved from a collection of small encampments, clinging to the north shore of



Howe Sound, to a bustling university town in the Olympic crosshairs.

But carving out an existence on a flood plain was not always pleasant. At times the residents of this community were quite literally between a rock and a wet place as a series of floods inundated the valley. The dyke system constructed to stave off the raging waters highlights the resiliency and ingenuity of previous generations of settlers.

In closing, let me call on some very timely advice from noted Canadian historian Desmond Morton:

“Canadians, like their historians, have spent too much time remembering conflicts, crises, and failures. They forgot the great, quiet continuity of life in a vast and generous land. A cautious people learns from its past; a sensible people can face its future.”

Recollections of a Squamish Railroader

In 1977 local resident Dixie Newman interviewed retired Squamish railroader Fred Downer. We recently received a copy of the interview and what follows is a condensed version:

"It was on the first of May, 1910, when I ventured up this way.

One day I saw a notice in the employment office: 'Men wanted for Railroad

construction. Fare: \$1.00'. So I went. I had to be down at the Terminal

Steamships dock there.

I got on the old Britannia and I thought I was heading up the coast somewhere...heading for Prince Rupert. There was a new railroad...just starting up. ...And since I'd been railroading, I



thought there's a good place to start... get seniority. Well, I found out I was up in a blind alley, up there at the head of Howe Sound in Squamish – as far as this run goes.

But then I had to look for the railway. I came up here to work on railroad construction. And I looked around...I couldn't see any railroad. I thought, like Vancouver, the railroad always comes to the waterfront. So I made inquiries... I called at the hotel there, and bought a beer, and talked to the old bartender. ...I pumped him for all I could about the railroad.

He was Charlie Volk, his name was. He had quite an accent – a Dutchman. But I got what I needed out of him. He said you go right up here, follow the road, and the road follows the river, and you go over the bridge – the Red Bridge. And then go on around and keep under the bluff..

So I followed his instructions. I just got across the bridge and met an old fellow there in a cabin. That was old Johnny MacDonald. He'd been up here quite a while, I guess, at Squamish.

And he got the name 'Chequebook' Johnny, because he was very generous. He'd say to someone, 'Are you short of money? Do you want some money? I'll lend you some money. I'll write you a cheque.' He didn't have anything to write a cheque on. But that was one of the old characters I met here.

So I kept along the way. I went along under the bluff, right close to the water, the river. And the tide was in slightly, which caused me to have to jump some spots there

where the tidewater was up.

So the trail was sort of knocked out a little there. It kept on right up there, to the end of that bluff, and here I came out and I saw cribwork, ties – making a cribwork and tracks on it. That's where the railroad began.

THE SQUAMISH HISTORIAN is published by the Squamish Historical Society.

Our purpose is to collect, preserve, document and showcase the history and artefacts of the community of Squamish and surrounding areas. Our Email address is: info@squamishhistory.ca

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Helmut Manzl hfmanzl@hotmail.com