

perspectives

...on the Semiahmoo Peninsula



White Rock's Marine Drive – then known as Washington Avenue – in 1958, one year after the city ceased being a ward of Surrey and became its own entity.

White Rock Museum & Archives photos

White Rock split from Surrey and became its own entity in 1957

60 years of stirring civic discourse

In April, the City of White Rock will celebrate its 60th birthday. Of course, the community is much older but until 1957, White Rock existed as a ward of Surrey.

The opening of the railway along the waterfront in 1909 caused the area to boom, and the explosive 1910 promotion of White

Lorraine and Hugh Ellenwood

historical perspective



Rock as a seaside mecca signalled the waning of rustic solitude.

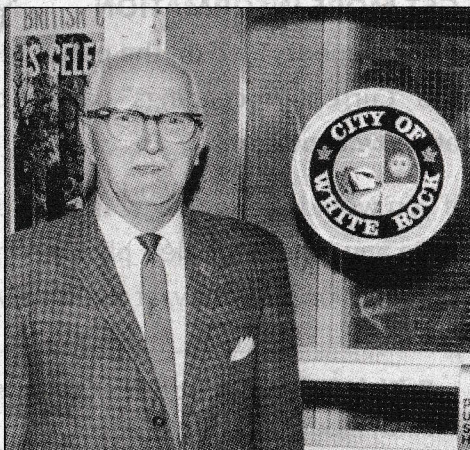
By 1913, the availability of three daily newspapers delivered to cottages every evening, as well as a daily bread delivery, dispelled the frontier image.

Residents, predominantly summer folk, were soon agitating for urban amenities.

Early on, Edith Vidal railed about the lack of sidewalks, and seasonal merchants complained about the dust and potholes of Washington Avenue (Marine Drive).

With a different set of priorities, Surrey civic administration was rarely in communion with this demanding segment of Ward 5.

Since the ward system was tax-based, the larger the population of a ward, the smaller its territorial size.



Ward boundaries were periodically adjusted. In 1948, Ward 7 was created, constituting the present City of White Rock. At the same time, the ongoing rhetoric regarding 'going it alone' came to a head. A referendum to secede from Surrey was defeated.

A determined incorporation committee soldiered on, and again petitioned Surrey council for a plebiscite in 1956. This time secession was sanctioned, and a 'provisional' council was appointed by the Department of Municipal Affairs, effective Jan. 5, 1957, with Charles Defieux as chairman.

White Rock became British Columbia's newest city on April 15, 1957. Defieux was named acting mayor along with acting councillors Leonard Parker, William Hodgson, Edward White, Alex Mitchell, William Shields and William Offer.



Above, White Rock's first mayor, Charles Defieux, is sworn in; left, Harry Douglass, city mayor from 1960-'69, eventually favoured amalgamation with South Surrey.

Defieux stressed that this council was purely a caretaker body, "set up to prepare an incorporation bill, and to serve as officers of the new city until a civic election is held."

On May 10, the local branch of the Junior Chamber of Commerce hosted an inaugural ball to honour the new city.

Howard Kennett, club president at the time, recently recalled the event.

"I was a young man of 30 when I attended the initial provisional council meeting. Now, at 90, I have to cast my memory back a long way, not always easy!" he said. "I realize what an important meeting it was, and how pleased I was to be there representing the JCs. At the inaugural ball at the Palladium, Vic Kerr and I presented an engraved tray and glasses to Mayor Defieux."

Certainly, the new city was not prepared to accommodate the offices of administration.

Initially, the 'city hall' was housed in the upper floor of a commercial building on Pacific Avenue. (White Rock City Hall was built in 1963. White Rock fire hall remained in Surrey until 1992.)

Defieux resigned in June, citing health and business reasons. William Hodgson replaced him as mayor, and Sidney Fennell was appointed to the vacant council seat.

In White Rock's first civic election, held on Sept. 19, mayoralty candidate Hodgson was victorious, along with councillors Alex Mitchell, William Offer, Max Zack, Lilian Browne, Sid Fennell and Jessie Lee.

This is not to say that all White Rock's citizens were now in accord. For years, heated debates had raged about what would best suit the community: Stay with Surrey? Incorporate as a village or a city? A more forward-thinking group advocated the acquisition of more territory than Ward 7.

Even Harry Douglass, mayor of White Rock from 1960 to 1969, came out in favour of amalgamation with South Surrey at the end of his term.

The prospect seemed too daunting for most citizens at the time. Opinions did not dissipate quickly.

Even today, 60 years after incorporation, White Rock continues to be a subject capable of stirring, poignant discourse.

The Peninsula's best-known mother-and-son historians, Lorraine and Hugh Ellenwood, are dedicated to preserving history through the White Rock Museum & Archives. Call 604-541-2225, or email whiterockarchives@telus.net