

Celebrating a few White Rock 'firsts'

The announcement of the firsts of the year – baby born; murder committed – triggered our thoughts about White Rock 'firsts', especially the unique qualities entailed in recording them.

Since White Rock history started long before White Rock became an official entity, a large number of 'firsts' were

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historical
perspective



secured along the way. With incorporation in 1957, another round of firsts were rung up, and things became a bit like B.C. and A.D.

For instance, pioneer Margaret Grant claimed her daughter, born about

1911, was the first white child born in the White Rock townsite. Forty-six years later, Douglas Blaine Kendall was celebrated as the City of White Rock's first baby.

All things considered, we've narrowed our firsts down to three categories, beginning with some which are irrefutable: White Rock's first school opened in 1910 on Henry Thrift's property; the area's first neon sign advertised George Thrift's real estate and insurance business on Washington Avenue (Marine Drive) in 1935; the first women's service club, the Soroptimists, was formed in 1950; White Rock's first traffic light (at the corner of North Bluff and Johnston roads) was installed in 1970; in 1988, White Rock gained the distinction of becoming the first municipality in Canada to request a coat of arms from the newly formed Canadian Heraldic Authority.

The second category is concerned with longevity, that is, those who endured long enough for people to think they must have been the first. Good examples of these are doctors, hairdressers, and fish and chip shops.

Doctors Blades and Hogg, coming to



Photos courtesy of White Rock Museum & Archives

Above, White Rock's first school, built in 1910; top right, White Rock was first to apply for a coat of arms from the Canadian Heraldic Authority in 1988, which governor general Ramon Hnatyshyn unveiled in the city in 1992; right, Kay Morrison in the doorway of Kay's Beauty Parlor in 1940.

White Rock after discharge from the Royal Canadian Air Force after the Second World War, were certainly the earliest doctors to stay the course, but were not the first to try. In the early 1940s, the Board of Trade made a valiant effort to entice a doctor to White Rock.

At least four made a stab at it, but the population couldn't (or were too healthy to) supply a living for them.

Recently, a correspondent took the time to advise us that her mother bought the oldest hairdressing salon in White Rock in 1961. That would be surprising news to the late Kay Morrison who established her shop in the late 1930s on Marine Drive. Actually, a hairdresser was in business in White Rock as early as 1926.

The fish and chip title is the fuzziest. Again, endurance is the key to the claim.



It has been recorded that the Davey family were the first, but Len Davey, in an interview several years ago, recounted that his parents had an eye on an established shop for rent in White Rock, but a 'friend' beat them to it. The friend had the temerity to ask Len's mother for her batter recipe.

"My mother gave her the recipe," chuckled Len. "But left out a secret ingredient."

» see page 12

First bird recorded

from page 11

The family went on to make a success of another location. It makes sense that there was a range of such eateries in White Rock before the Davey family arrived in the late 1920s.

But they endured, contributing to the development of the community in many other ways, and so are remembered.

The third category, tenuous at best, contains the 'firsts' impossible to prove. In a more bucolic era, the first robin of spring was annually reported.

Did the bird appear with a 'I'm the first' banner? Another item in this slot is the news that Mrs. Vidal had made the first blackberry pie of the season. Was it a coincidence that Mr. Vidal was the local reporter for the newspaper?

Firsts, or otherwise, all historical information is interesting and welcome in our business, and often the presenters also learn a little more of White Rock history.

Finally, we can't declare recently-published author, Tom Saunders, White Rock's first writer of children's



White Rock Museum photo

Connie Whittle, the first Miss White Rock, holds nephew Douglas Kendall, the city's first baby, in May 1957.

books, but feel safe in saying that he's the first (and tallest) lifelong resident to write a children's book about a trip to the moon. Congratulations, Tom.

We can also confidently assure our readers that we are the first mother-and-son team to write a column on White Rock history for the *Peace Arch News*.

Happy New Year, everyone.

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 604-541-2222, or email whiterockarchives@telus.net