

lifestyles

# Semiahmoo Peninsula built by volunteers

April is volunteer appreciation month, and it would be difficult to find a community more volunteer-oriented than White Rock.

Of course, South Surrey has to be included in this contingent, allegiance to the 'cause' overriding the geographical one.

Before building standards and trades-union regulations imposed barriers, public buildings were often erected by volunteer labour. White Rock's first school and early churches are examples.

Work progressed according to the availability of donated labour and materials. The first Legion hall, adjacent to the pier, is typical. Although construction started soon after the First World War, it wasn't officially opened until 1929.

Organization of the White Rock volunteer fire brigade in late 1933 was prompted by the fact that the main commercial sector on the waterfront had burned down twice in three years.

The first annual White Rock Volunteer Fire Brigade Ball was held in 1934 to raise funds for equipment.

Paid personnel appeared only in 1949, in the form of a fire chief, so

volunteers were still essential.

Without question, the most outstanding illustration of the quality of White Rock volunteerism is Peace Arch Hospital.

Its existence certainly wasn't handed to the community on a platter. Rather, back in the late 1940s, north and south Surrey vied for the honour of acquiring the municipality's first government-funded hospital. This sparked a passion equal to an evangelical quest.

Volunteers flocked to the undertaking, pledging money, untold hours of materials and labour.

When White Rock was given the go-ahead, volunteer workmen of all ages turned up, including 84-year-old O.H. Ring, who "turned in a damn good day's work, too," according to hospital administrator Ray Williams.

It was hard to find a woman in the area who did not belong to a hospital 'auxiliary' group.

Over the years, dedication hasn't lessened. For example, Kwatcha Group, whose members' average age is 70, has raised many thousands of dollars specializing in linen sales as their contribution



White Rock Museum & Archives photo

The city's legion building next to the White Rock pier was built with volunteer labour in the 1920s.

to the hospital since 1999.

More than 10 years ago, Peace Arch Community Services directory listed 96 area agencies needing volunteers, and it would be surprising if their appeals were not responded to.

There's always been myriad

volunteers whose contributions go unheralded but for the quality of life sustained by them in our community.

One such organization is White Rock Museum & Archives, established by volunteers, and still dependent on the services

and talents of such charitable individuals. Although no longer actively participating, Russell Porter, Flora Morton and Gerda Cremer are illustrative of these unsung heroes.

Russell, an inveterate collector, see page A19



## Volunteers help out of love for city

from page A18

bought 200 glass-plate negatives of White Rock created in the early and pre-1920s by Vancouver photographer Walter Calder. He donated the collection to the archives to provide the public a better understanding of White Rock's past.

Russell also served as the first chairman of the White Rock Museum & Archives board, and still takes a keen interest in the institution's well-being.

On retirement from her career as White Rock community librarian, Flora Morton donated herself to the fledgling archives, leading a volunteer team with such expertise and dedication that White Rock was declared the best small archives in B.C.

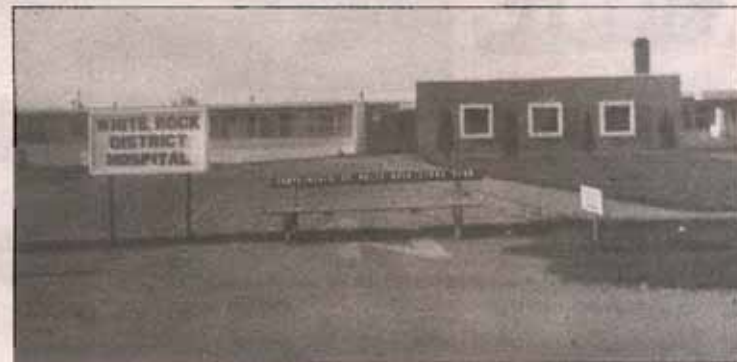
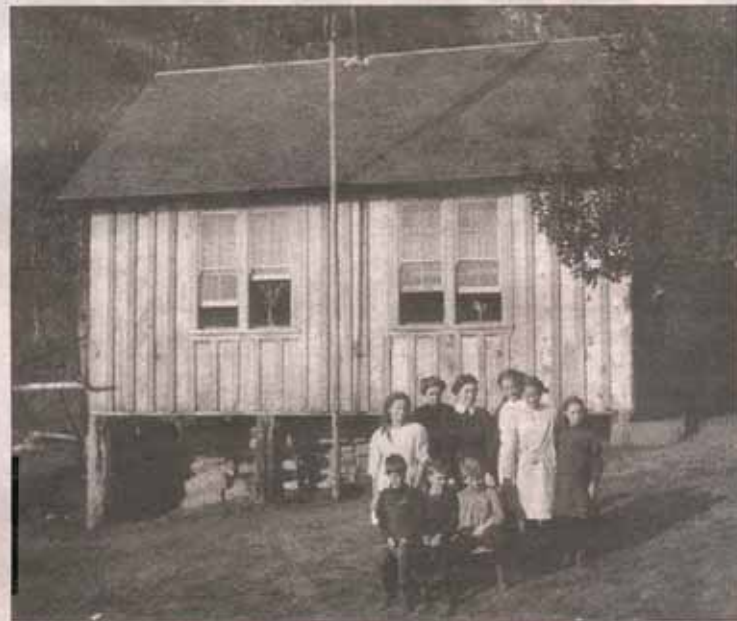
Gerda Cremer, a bookkeeper by profession, quietly and efficiently kept the museum's finances in order for 17 years, besides manning the gift shop two days a week.

Awareness of our responsibility to our community doesn't get better than this.

### Who's on first

To emphasize the point of our story on White Rock 'firsts' in January, the statement that Connie Whittle was the first Miss White Rock needs clarification.

Actually, the first person to be named Miss White Rock was Donna Pugh, in 1952. Unfortunately, rather than representing White Rock at the PNE pageant, she had to win the Miss Surrey contest to qualify. By 1955, the rules had changed



White Rock Museum & Archives photos

**Built in 1910, White Rock's first school (top) was built by volunteers, as was the city's first hospital (above) in 1954.**

so that Connie went directly to the PNE competition as Miss White Rock.

To confuse the issue further, Fern Walker became the first Miss White Rock after White Rock was incorporated as a city in 1957.

*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](mailto:whiterockarchives@telus.net)*