

White Rock pioneer family remembered



White Rock Museum & Archives photo

Ann and David Wix (background) with their granddaughters Alice, Lucy and Ruby.

Many local residents have vivid memories of their families' arrival in the White Rock area.

If that date has long passed into history, it could mean the family qualifies as pioneer, having settled in the district prior to the First World War.

A case in point is South Surrey resident Norma Langton. Fortunately, she possesses a rare abundance of records to illustrate the part her family played in White Rock's early development.

In 1902, Norma's great-grandparents, Londoners David and Ann Wix, emigrated to Manitoba during the great push to settle Canada's prairie territory. Within seven years, they moved further west to Langley, where David became the first postmaster in Fernridge, and their daughter, Emily, married Surrey pioneer George Figg in 1910.

In the previous year, their older daughter, Eva, had married Boer War veteran Nelson Henry in Manitoba. When the harsh prairie winters caused health problems for Eva, the family – which now included son David Edwin – joined her parents in Fernridge, where second son Sydney was born in 1911.

A blacksmith and millwright, Nelson found work at the Hunter & Fox lumber mill in Hazelmere. This was not to last long. Fire destroyed the mill, their house and most of their belongings in 1912.

The railway had been rerouted along the White Rock waterfront, and Nelson became head millwright at the replacement mill, Campbell River Lumber Company, built on leased Semiahmoo Reserve land.

In a 1966 interview, Eva remembered, "on July 1, 1913, riding along Campbell River Road with the children and what furniture we had saved in a wagon drawn by a team of horses."

The Henrys lived in a tent (not an unusual mode of housing at the time) while building their home, Springbank, at the northeast corner of Kent Street and Marine Drive. During this time, Norma's father, Harold, was born. A fourth son, Claire, was born in 1921.

Nelson suffered an accident at the mill in 1925, which incapacitated him for his job, but he still enjoyed woodworking, creating unique pieces of furniture, especially for his granddaughters.

Norma remembers he had a cot in his workroom where he could rest his injured back.

Although he kept a keen eye on civic affairs, Nelson preferred leaving the community involvement to his wife, an activity she handled with a great deal of energy.

Over the years, Eva served as president of the ladies auxiliary of the Legion and the Army and Navy Club, and she joined the Hazelmere Women's Institute in 1912.

Perhaps Eva is best remembered for her 10-year stint – 1932 to 1941 – as a member of the executive of the White Rock May Queen event when it was at the height of its popularity.

True to family tradition, Harold and Claire enlisted for service in the Second World

War. While overseas, Harold married Joyce Blythman, an English girl. After Norma was born, she and her mother travelled to White Rock along with other war brides in 1945.

Looking back on her childhood, Norma recalls idyllic summers at the beach, as well as snowy winters and the rigors of managing a one-piece snowsuit when the only toilet facility was an unheated outhouse.

At a young age, Claire displayed an exceptional artistic talent, which he used to meet celebrities passing through White Rock by train. Impressed with his sketch likenesses, his subjects – Madeleine Carroll and Elsa Maxwell among them – usually rewarded him with an autograph on the portrait.

As a member of the first graduating class at Semiahmoo High School, he designed the school crest. When the White Rock Arts and Crafts League was formed in 1952, Claire was elected president.

By 1919, David and Ann Wix had retired to White Rock, where David became involved in community affairs. He died in 1928, still mourning the loss of his two sons.

Eighteen-year-old Montague had been killed in 1916 in Belgium. Langley's Wix Road and Wix-Brown School commemorate the family's loss. In 1921, older son David William died of wounds inflicted at Vimy Ridge. He had been an organizer of the White Rock Branch of the GWVA, the forerunner of the Canadian Legion.

When the Legion clubhouse on the pier was formally opened in 1929, David William's name was one of four inscribed on the memorial plaque above the fireplace.

Nelson died in 1952, and Eva in 1966, but their efforts for the betterment of the community will be remembered. Norma and her husband, Ken, have son Keith, daughter Pam and four granddaughters living nearby, ready to care for a century's worth of well-documented family history in White Rock.

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

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