

New light on old stories

Shortly after his arrival in Maple Ridge from Ontario, in 1876 or 1877, so it is commonly told, Thomas Haney acquired land from the “Wickwire estate.” The story goes on to tell that the Haney family first lived across the Fraser in Derby in an old house and then moved to a cabin they built – a log cabin some say – on the future Port Haney land. In 1878 the Haney family moved to their newly built permanent home that we know today as Haney House.

A new look at contemporary records reveals that it took longer than just a couple of years for Thomas Haney to acquire his land and permanently settle his family in their family home. Other findings shine light on the builders and the actual time of completion of Haney House, and on Thomas Haney’s activities as a brick maker.

The late James Wickwire was a member of a family of farmers from Ontario. Wickwire pre-empted the land in 1860, but when he died in 1872 the government had yet to grant him the acreage. Only in June of 1879 was the property granted to the executors of James Wickwire’s will. Two months later they transferred the title of the land to Thomas Haney.

Thomas Haney and his family probably lived on that land even before he held the title. Whether Haney built a new cabin or simply fixed up an existing building is not clear. It was from here that Mrs. Haney must have seen 20 to 30 acres of her neighbour's land slide into the Fraser River, half a mile to the west.

It was not from Haney House that Mrs. Haney witnessed the 1880 slide. As the 31 October 1883 issue of the *British Columbian* reveals: “Mr. Thomas Haney has during the past year erected a commodious dwelling house, which adds very materially to the importance of Port Haney.” Author and historian Daphne Sleight already spotted and shared this news item more than 20 years ago. Strangely the year 1878 has continued to be shown as the construction year of Haney House even though obviously 1883 is the correct one.

Another story tells us that Thomas Haney built Haney House with the help of carpenter Samuel Edge, and Haney’s father-in-law Daniel Callaghan. In 1877 Daniel Sr., a widower, had joined his only daughter and his sons in Maple Ridge but he died the following year. As the house was constructed in 1883, it must have been his son, Daniel Jr. who was the builder of Haney House. In the 1891 Canada Census, young Daniel’s profession is shown as “town carpenter.” His name is connected with several other buildings in Maple Ridge.

As from 1882, the year of the start of the construction of the transcontinental railroad in the Lower Mainland, Thomas Haney’s land, often before referred to as “Haney’s Landing,” became known as Port Haney. A strong wharf was built there, the first businesses were established and churches built – initiatives by or supported and encouraged by Thomas Haney. In 1884 the first registered taxpayer for land in Port Haney, aside from Thomas Haney, was his brother-in-law Jeremiah Callagan who owned there a two-acre “village lot” and a home.

From 1886 onward the demand for bricks for the building of the new city of Vancouver soared and overnight brick making became a lucrative business. That year Henry Robert Beckett and his son Ernest William Beckett were already producing bricks in Port Haney and others quickly followed their example. These small seasonal operations soon became more sophisticated, employing a good number of mainly Chinese workers and starting to shape the bricks mechanically.

Thomas Haney was a skilled brick maker, who, it is said, developed the first brickyard in Maple Ridge. Although he may have made his own bricks when he settled in Maple Ridge, his profession is usually shown as “farmer.” Only in some directories from 1888 to 1895 and in the Canada Census of 1891 does his profession appear as a brick maker or a brick manufacturer. Haney’s name is missing from the regular reports on the Port Haney brickyards in contemporary newspapers, but even if there is no evidence that he operated a brickyard of his own, he was probably still a key player in the brickmaking industry in Port

Haney. There is a hint of him being associated with the Beckett brickyard, the earliest in Port Haney. Thomas Haney's reluctance to enter business under his own name could be explained by the fact that the brickyard he had started in Ontario had been a financial failure—he had been declared insolvent before moving west.

In 1889 Thomas Haney subdivided the western part of Port Haney into small residential lots. He gave the streets in the subdivision the names that are still in use today. Thanks to the driving force of Thomas Haney and the energy of its residents it did not take long to turn Port Haney into the heart of Maple Ridge.