

WHONNOCK COMMUNITY WEB SITE

Whonnock: "From the Halkomelem word meaning 'place where there are [always] humpback salmon.'" (Akrigg: *British Columbia Place Names*)



A short history of Whonnock Post Office (1)



The Whonnock post office in the 1930s as it was built in 1916. To the right is Showler's Red and White store.

Note that the present building (below, 1950s) is to the left of the old post office site.



Whonnock is a community near the eastern end of the Municipality of Maple Ridge. The area is about 5,900 acres; the estimated population is a minimum of 1,700.

Most early businesses were located near the river and later near the CPR [station]. One of the first of these was York's store located opposite "CPR Mile 96"—a general store, small hotel, tranship and freight warehouse, steamer landing, telegraph office, post office and, of course, community news and information centre. The post office was established August 1st, 1885 and the first postmaster was Noble Oliver.

York's store burnt in 1911 (2) and the post office was located temporarily in the CPR station. A new post office was built at the present post office location, 26915 River Road. It was rebuilt in 1928 and again in 1932. A wing was added in the 1940s to facilitate sorting and expediting Rural Route mail. Whonnock's Rural Route started half a mile from the post office and served a large area—at first 18¾ miles.

Haney post office changed its name to Maple Ridge post office in the 1970s and to increase its volume it engineered the demise of Ruskin post office and the takeover of Ruskin and Whonnock rural routes, with a considerable increase in personnel.

For over 100 years the Whonnock post office and land have been owned by the current postmaster. This could be one of the reasons why Whonnock people have enjoyed such exceptional caring service.

In general post office costs have spiralled outrageously and service has deteriorated to a shameful degree; however the one unchanging feature has been the more than excellent service offered by rural post offices and staff. Their service can be truly described as some of the mortar that binds communities together. (3)

In the late 1800s to early 1900s Fort Langley received its mail through the Whonnock post office. Glen Valley had its mail service through the Whonnock post office until the 1930s. The Glen Valley post office was in a general store at the corner of Jackman Road (272nd street) and River Road. Mail was rowed over every weekday morning after being sorted in the Whonnock post office. This writer [Brian Byrnes] earned many a quarter—35¢ in ice—rowing mail over the Fraser. Herb Cain of Glen Valley deserves a place in post office history for his unfailing performance of this chore—over many years he never missed.

A couple of quotes from John Williamson's diary (4) while working in York's store.

"August 2 [1897]— Fine weather. Mr. Hutchinson and four men putting in a mail catching post opposite the store door."

"August 26 [1897] – Very warm – 80° – Business is fair, Mr. Fletcher the post office inspector was here today, everything about the post office was all right. No 2 missed the mailbag today...."

Brian Byrnes, 1980s

Whonnock Notes No. 11 "It Was a Wonderful Life."

(1) Brian Byrnes's writing was used in 1995 by postmaster Lila Timmins to write a leaflet with the same title giving credit to Brian Byrnes were due. *fb*

(2) R.S. Whiting was appointed post master in 1907. We know now that the fire occurred on 14 March of 1916 (not 1911) "the mail was rescued." The new Whonnock post office seem to have been ready a few weeks later. See *Traces*, Spring 2001. "Mr Methot and the burning of the Whonnock Store." *fb*

(3) These notes were written at a time when rural post offices were closed everywhere. Rural Dignity of Canada, an action group, tried to stop the closures. Their slogan was: "Save Our Small Post Office." In their 1988 calendar we find two quotations from Brian's writing. In February: "The one unchanging feature of the dismal (postal) scenario has been the more than excellent sustained service offered by the rural post offices and staff. Their service can be truly described as the mortar that bonds communities together. In October: In 1920 Glen Valley received its mail through the Whonnock post office; mail was rowed across the Fraser River every weekday morning. Herb Cain of Glen Valley deserves a place in post office history as he never missed a day (an unfailing performance of this chore) he never missed a trip for years and years. I earned many quarter (35¢ in ice) rowing the mail across." *fb*

(4) Full text of the diary in Whonnock Notes # 5, "Whonnock 1897, John Williamson's Diary." *fb*

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