

WHONNOCK COMMUNITY WEB SITE

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



Whonnock United Church 90 Years Old



The history of the Whonnock Presbyterians dates back to the regular services by the Rev. Alexander Dunn in Whonnock in 1888.

In 1914, a Church of Presbyterian faith was built on land donated by John Brodie. Following plans drawn by R.A. Hamilton, contractor-carpenter Olaus Lee constructed the building with volunteer help.

The church was dedicated on Sunday, 12 September 1914, in the presence of the Reverend Dr. Alexander Dunn, Whonnock's first Presbyterian minister.

In 1925 the Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Canada were amalgamated, and Whonnock Presbyterian became Whonnock United Church.

The Reverend Alexander Dunn & Whonnock

The land where Whonnock United Church stands was once owned by Whonnock's first Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Alexander Dunn.

The story of Presbyterianism in Maple Ridge starts with the Reverend Robert Jamieson, who came from Ontario to New Westminster in 1862 and conducted the first Presbyterian service at the McIvor homestead that year.

In 1875, straight from Scotland, the Reverend Alexander Dunn was assigned to carry on the work began by Mr. Jamieson. Mr. Dunn lived in Langley and for a decade he served the settlers on both sides of the Fraser River from Yale to Eburne (Marpole), including Maple Ridge.

Mr. Dunn married Annie Kern from Ontario in 1882. The couple left Langley in the spring of 1886 and, after a few months of "rest and change," in Ontario, Mr. Dunn began a pastorate at Port Alberni. Two years later, in the spring of 1888, the minister and his wife returned to the mainland.

At that time the people at Mount Lehman and Port Haney were completing their own church building, and each of the two communities would have welcomed the well-respected Mr. Dunn as a resident. He, however, moved to Whonnock although there was no church building there and only a small number of Presbyterians.

Before he left Langley for Port Alberni the Reverend Alexander Dunn had purchased 80 acres of land—the core of Whonnock—from another "Old Kirk" man, Robert Robertson, the first white settler in Whonnock. The coming of the railroad in 1885 and the fact that Whonnock had a station were good reasons to invest in land in Whonnock. Mr Dunn knew Robert Robertson because, from the minister's arrival in British Columbia the Shetlander had rowed him tirelessly up and down the Fraser between Mission and Eburne and "Robbie" would continue to do so after Whonnock became the centre of Dunn's pastorate.

Radiating out from Whonnock the Reverend Alexander Dunn started serving the settlements on the north shore of the Fraser between Yale and Whonnock as well as Mt. Lehman and Aldergrove. Around 1890 [1892?] his field included St. Andrews in Port Haney. The Reverend and Mrs. Dunn lived in Whonnock until 1905, when the minister retired. By that time they had sold their 80 acres land, reaping the rewards for their confidence in Whonnock's future. *fb*

the Presbyterian Church in Whonnock before 1914

During the almost 18 years of his stay in Whonnock, the Reverend Alexander Dunn conducted Sunday worship. From an old diary we know that he preached every month in Whonnock and that people from the Stave River area and from across the river joined the Whonnock residents in the small schoolhouse on the edge of the Fraser River to hear Mr. Dunn speak.

The school seems to have been a satisfactory location for the minister as well



The Reverend Alexander Dunn and Annie (Kern) Dunn. Photo courtesy Donald Waite.

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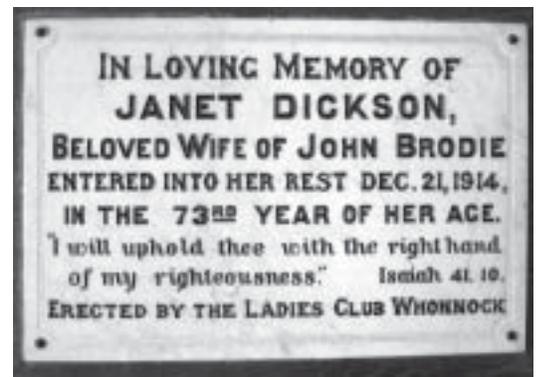
as his pioneer flock, however, after Mr. Dunn's retirement in 1905 a wave of new settlers moved to the area and in 1910 a small group of these new residents, dedicated Presbyterians, met at the school "to discuss the local management of the church" in Whonnock. They committed themselves "towards the furtherance of the Gospel in connection with the Presbyterian Church at Whonnock." The men's names were: John Brodie, R. Aikman, Hugh Steele, R.A. Hamilton, J.P. Thompson, J.S. Black. Also present was one women: Mrs. Brodie. A little later, in January 1911, the gentlemen formed a "managers committee," including James Rolley, the only committee member who had been a long-time Whonnock resident.

In the spring of 1912, the sections Whonnock, Ruskin, Albion, and Silverdale were removed from the Haney congregation and the Reverend George Fisher was appointed to the new field. He started giving weekly services to Ruskin and Albion and fortnightly services to Whonnock and Silverdale. However, as the number of newcomers joining the church in Whonnock kept growing, in 1913 Whonnock asked for and was granted a weekly service as well. Added to the roll were the names of Mrs. F. Pullen, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Graham. Capt. and Mrs. E. Reid, Mr. and Mrs. E. Cuthbert, Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Wright, Mr. and Mrs. Duncan Graham.

In 1913 the Ladies' Aid Society of Whonnock Presbyterian Church was formed, with Mrs. Captain Reid, Mrs. Hamilton, Mrs. Cuthbert, and Mrs. Gott at the helm. (Mrs. Gott moved away in the fall of that year.) The society's object was to further the financial and social interests of the church and community. The ladies immediately went to work. A home cooking sale at the newly built Ladies Hall was their first activity followed by a plethora of other money-generating projects: sewing (it is amazing how many aprons could be sold in a small community like Whonnock), knitting, musical programs, lantern slide lectures.

Up to this time the school was still being used, for the small fee of 25¢. However, as the number of new members increased the congregation began to think about a proper church building. At an annual "business and social meeting" of January 1914 Mr. Brodie suggested to build a church and a motion directed the "managers" to "take steps towards the erection of a church to cost \$500." The amount was guaranteed by Mr. Brodie and according to him already subscribed.

A few months later the congregation assembled once more, this time to hear that the cost for material and labour for the building of a church seating 100 was estimated at \$800. The women of Ladies' Aid were prepared to borrow and repay the difference up to \$300 to assure that the church would be built. The congregation agreed to borrow the amount, but Mr. Aikman did not want to see the congregation going into debt and resigned as a manager. It proved to be a heavy burden for the congregation; the final cost of the church and its furnishings would be \$1,129.10. But sufficient money was raised, mainly by subscription, and the debt was cleared off by 1918. Special thanks went to Mr. John Brodie, convener of the building committee, and to Ladies' Aid. *fb*



This tablet, attached to a wall in the vestry of the church, was presented by the "Ladies Club" formed in 1911 (not Ladies' Aid) who built the Ladies Hall—completed in 1912—later known as Whonnock Memorial Hall.

John Brodie—retired Hudson's Bay Factor from Manitoba—and his wife Janet were both born in Scotland, but lived most of their lives in Canada. They were clearly the driving force behind the building of the church. They gave their personal guarantees for the financing of the building of the church and donated the land on which the church stands.

John Brodie never lost his interest in the church and its wellbeing. He remained active in the affairs of the church, until he retired as senior elder and superintendent and treasurer for the Sunday School at age eighty. After John Brodie died in 1938 his house became today's Christian Education Building

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