

Whonnock's Post Office

by Fred Braches



The one unchanging feature of the dismal [postal] scenario has been the more than excellent sustained service offered by rural post offices and staff. Their service can be truly described as the mortar that bonds communities together. Brian Byrnes, 1988

Whonnock Postmasters

Noble Oliver	1 August 1885 – 1890
Geo. A. Smith	1 May 1890 – 7 April 1894
L.C. York	1 July 1894 – 13 June 1906
William Russell	1 June 1906 – 13 November 1907
R.S. Whiting	1 December 1907 – 22 April 1953
Ralph S. Daniels	9 June 1953 – 31 March 1968
Willadee Daniels	1 April 1969 – 3 September 1973
Corinne French	4 September 1973 – 11 August 1975
Mark DesRochers	12 August 1975 – 30 March 1979
Marietta Davis	4 February 1979 – 30 March 1980
Mark DesRochers	30 March 1980 – 2 February 1986
Lila Timmins	3 February 1986 – 31 May 1994
Sue Schulze	1 June 1994 –

ASSISTANTS TO POSTMASTERS AND PART-TIME CLERKS

(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

BARNES, Donna; BLACK, Helen and Jean; CAIN, Herb; CHARLTON, R.; DAVIS, Heather, Lorne, and Marietta;
DREWRY, Mary; ELLIS, Margaret; FRENCH, Corinne and Heather; HANEY, Frank; HILLAND, Marjorie;
HOLLINSHEAD, Edith; LEGGETT, Teresa; MCKAY, Norris; MILNE, Margaret; PARKER, Winnie; PENFOLD, Sally;
PULLEN, Isobel; ROLLEY, Pat; SANFORD, Rodeline; SPROTT, Katy; TIMMINS, Lila;
WHEELER, Mrs.; WHITE, Colleen; WHITING, Bernhard.



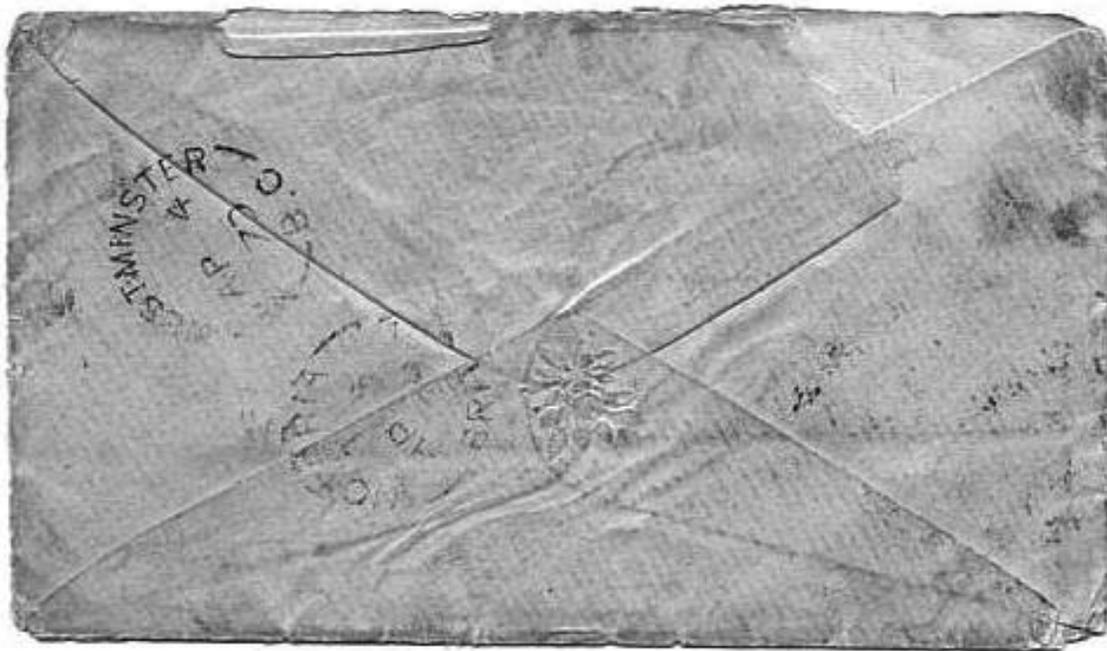
ON 25 NOVEMBER 2000, a Heritage Plaque was unveiled at the Whonnock Post Office to recognize its value to Maple Ridge and in particular the community of Whonnock.

Whonnock has had its own post office for 120 years. There was first a post office at the Whonnock Store from 1885 until 1916, when the store burned down. A few weeks later a small post office was opened at its present address, 26915 River Road.

This issue of *Whonnock Notes* is dedicated to all the Whonnock postmasters and their assistants.

Fred Braches

The above drawing by Harry Blackwell is shown on the Heritage Plaque at the entrance of the Whonnock post office. The text on the plaque reads: "Postal service was established in Whonnock in 1885. This small post station was built by R.S. Whiting; it was rebuilt in 1928 and again in 1932. It stands in the very centre of the Whonnock commercial area and is symbolic of the community that it has served for many years."



Before 1885

ON THE 11TH OF NOVEMBER 1860 Charlotte Robertson mailed a letter from the Shetlands to her son Robert Robertson in Whonnock, replying to a letter mailed in Fort Langley she had just received from him. The last letter she had written to Robert was mailed when she thought he still worked for the Hudson's Bay Company in northern BC. The mail was carried by one of the twice-yearly ships to the Hudson Bay and beyond, but Robert had meanwhile retired to Whonnock, where he received the letter his mother wrote him one-and-a-half years earlier.

In the absence of news, Charlotte Robertson had lived in fear about Robert's life, and she was relieved to know that he was well. She was impressed about the mail service to Fort Langley: "Your letter astonishes me by its date of Fort Langley September 16th 1860, thus wanting 6 Days of 3 Months....It will yet be some time before the Mail gets there through the United States and Canada...but your letter via Panama can come here in 80 days—and you can write me and I you every fortnight by regular Steamers....The Post Office people tell me I and you can write each other every Week and I must therefore [hope] that you will write us more frequently." Unfortunately for Mrs. Robertson, her son was not a great letter writer.

Fort Langley was the postal address for all the settlers in the area for a long time. In 1876, two years after the incorporation of Maple Ridge, a post office opened at the "The Ridge." Other communities in the District of Maple Ridge only opened their own post offices with the arrival of the railroad on the north shore of the Fraser: Port Haney first, in May 1884, followed by Port Hammond in April 1885 and Whonnock on 1 August 1885.

Of all historic Maple Ridge post offices only the Whonnock post office can boast more than a century of continuous service.

Opposite: Cover of a letter mailed in the Shetlands on 21 February 1870, reaching Fort Langley via Victoria and New Westminster. The cancellation date of New Westminster is 5 April 1870—about six weeks transit. By this time the mail would have travelled by train across the United States to San Francisco and from there by steamer to Victoria.

Post Office Department, Canada.

Post Office Inspector's Office

Victoria, B. C. 18 September 1884

No 102

Sir

I have the honor to transmit
herewith the enclosed application for the
establishment of a Post Office at
Warriock

and for the appointment of
Mr Noble Oliver
as Postmaster.

I beg to report that the place
where the Post Office is applied for is the
name of a Station on the S. P. Ry and is
situated

From Port Waney 7 Miles E.

" Matsqui 10 " W

both Post Offices served from the line of
Railway

The Honorable
The Postmaster General

Noble Oliver 1885–1890

THE PIONEERS DID NOT KNOW Whonnock by that name. They would have described the place where they lived as “near (Fort) Langley” or “near the Stave River.” Only after the post office “Whonnock” was established in 1885, did the settlers start to identify the place where they lived as “Whonnock.”

Robert Robertson, who settled in the area as early as 1860, received the grant for Lot 433 in August 1884. That land formed the historic core of Whonnock along the river and railway. That same month, Noble Oliver's wife Catherine arrived in Whonnock, after travelling with her family from Ontario by train to San Francisco and then by ship to Victoria.

Both Noble and Catherine were born in Ireland and grew up in Ontario. They were close to 50 years old when they came to Whonnock with their seven children. The oldest, Sarah Elizabeth, 25, married Michael (Mike) McCarthy within a year after their arrival in Whonnock, while the the youngest, Noble Jr., was only six years old.

It is not known when and how Noble Oliver himself travelled to Whonnock, but he had a building with a store and living quarters ready when he met his wife and children in Victoria.

The Land Registry records show that on 14 October 1884 Robert Robertson transferred part of Lot No. 433, an acre of land “...adjoining Warnoc Station grounds...” to the Olivers.

As the Post Office Inspector mentioned in his application, dated 18 September 1884, to establish a post office in “Warnock,” “This place is more correctly known as ‘Whonnock’ from the Indian village in the vicinity.” The inspector recommended that a post office be established in “the store of Mr. Noble Oliver...situated within one quarter of a mile of the station house.... It can be served with mail from the railway from once to three times a week as may be found most convenient.” A year later, starting 1 August 1885, Noble Oliver was appointed postmaster in Whonnock, a position he held until 1890.

Opposite: Front page of the application for the establishment of a post office in “Warnock” and for the appointment of Noble Oliver as postmaster.



The Whonnock Store built by Oliver Noble in 1885. The right half of the building are living quarters.



Noble Oliver and his wife many years later at their place on what is now 272nd Street.

The year 1885 was also the year when Whonnock opened its first school, the Stave River School, and Noble Oliver had taken the lead in its establishment. In the summer of 1884 he formed a board of trustees and negotiated with the Superintendent of Education in Victoria. Robert Robertson donated land and that settled the matter. Noble Oliver remained a trustee and the secretary of the school board for ten years.

With a railway station, a store, a post office, and a school, Whonnock's amenities in 1885 were comparable to those of Port Hammond. Whonnock was the right place to settle, certainly if one had school-age children.

George Alexander Smith 1890–1894

NOBLE OLIVER SEEMS TO HAVE MISSED the skills to establish a good relationship with the people in the area. In 1888, he ran for council for his ward but he lost to Peter Baker by a wide margin. In December of that year, his 13-year-old son, Robert Elwood Oliver, died of diphtheria. These events may have prompted Noble Oliver to give up shop-keeping and he withdrew to farm on his land on 272nd Street, away from the river.

Noble Oliver sold the shop to the Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Alexander Dunn, and George Alexander Smith became the store keeper, but Noble Oliver continued to collect the remuneration as postmaster and he was not going to give that up.

In November of 1889, a group of settlers signed a petition urging the postal authorities to nominate Mr. Smith as postmaster instead of Mr. Oliver "as soon as possible" because Smith, not Oliver, was doing the job, and obviously to the satisfaction of many. The petition, showing 31 signatures, was forwarded to the postal authorities with a cover letter by the Reverend Alexander Dunn.

That Mr. Sampson would have tried to get
 him Mr. Oliver out of the position of postmaster
 of Warnock, seeing they belonged to the same
 Church. Mr. Sampson said it would be a
 matter of Church - it was a matter of pub-
 lic opinion. The people in the neighbour-
 hood wished the post office ^{to be} at the Store &
 Mr. Smith to keep it. Mr. Sampson by the
 way reminded Mr. Ditcham that as he was
 not a resident of Warnock he should not
 interfere or have anything to say on the
 subject. Mr. Oliver declared in the presence
 of these two ~~gentlemen~~ gentlemen that he never
 intended that the Storekeeper should have
 the post office, but that Mr. Oliver should
 have it - further that Mr. Oliver had not paid
 in full for the building & lot. When the
 agreement between Mr. Oliver & me was drawn
 up by the lawyers in New Westminster, Mr. Oliver
 signed a document binding himself to be
 sign the post office of postmaster whenever
 a man that would suit the people be-
 came Storekeeper. The people in the most
 unmistakable manner have signified
 their wishes ^{in favour of} Mr. Oliver. I suppose, has
 not resigned. In answer to Mr. Oliver's asser-
 tion that I had not fully paid for the build-
 ings and lot I may say that I possess
 the deed of the place, and Mr. Oliver is

The Post Office Inspector in Victoria noted in his letter to Ottawa that he had written to Noble Oliver informing him that his resignation was expected. Oliver delayed his response because he wanted to find out who from the neighbourhood had signed the petition. He called it “a very underhanded way [by Dunn and Smith] to try to get a post office.” Oliver was Anglican by faith, and there were no signatures of Church of England people on the petition, with one glaring exception: Mr. Sampson, Justice of the Peace, a prominent Church of England member who had hosted the Anglican Bishop Sillitoe in his house in the summer of 1889.

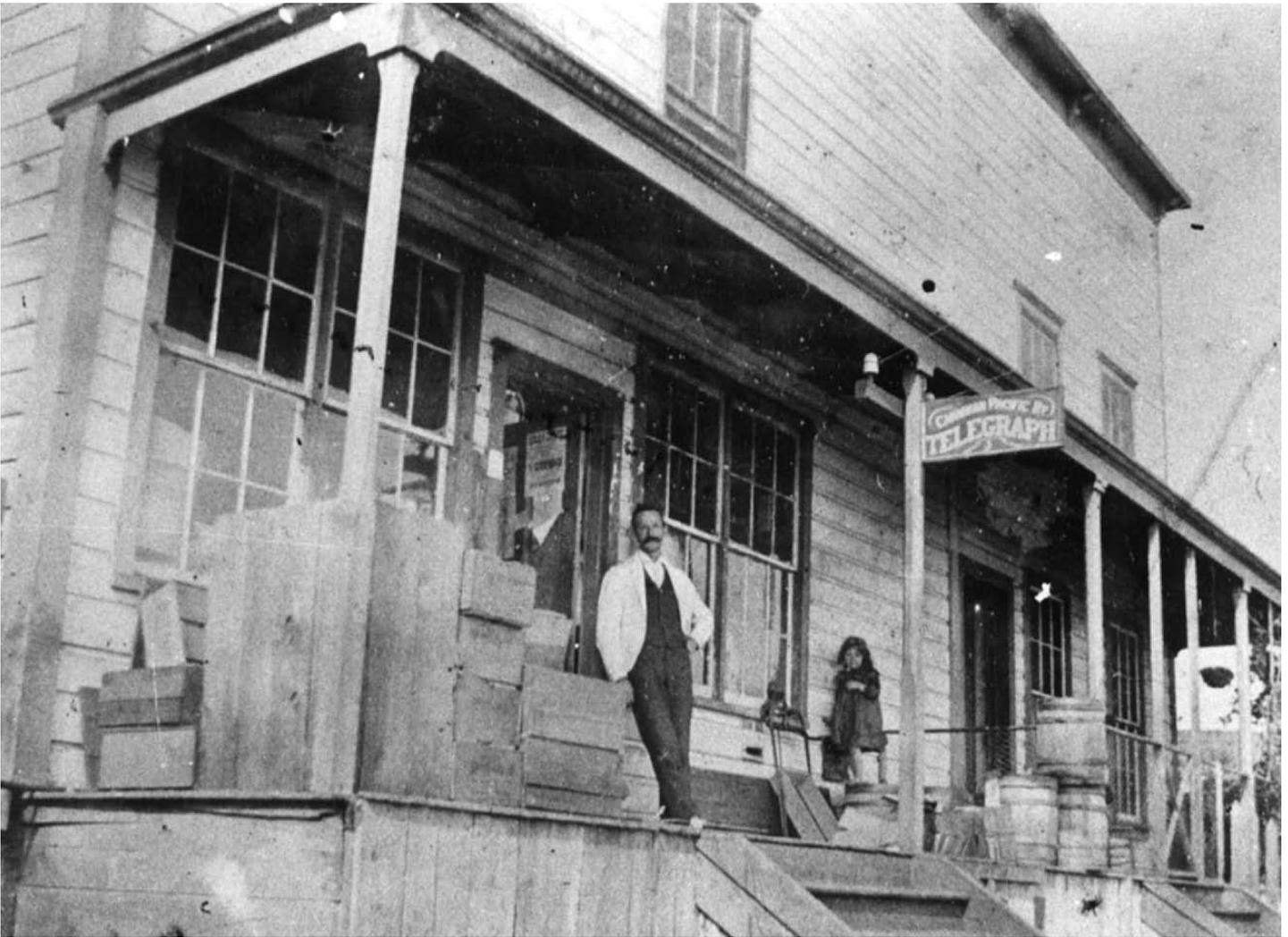
Early in January 1890, at the close of the Divine Service at the Whonnock School, the Anglican Reverend Ditcham and Noble Oliver cornered Mr. Sampson. Ditcham asked whether Sampson had indeed signed the petition and Oliver wanted to know how Sampson could have done this to a fellow parishioner.

As the Reverend Dunn reported, “Mr. Sampson said that it was not a matter about churches, but a matter of public opinion—the people in the neighbourhood wished the post office to be at the store and Mr. Smith to keep it. Mr. Sampson, by the way, reminded Mr. Ditcham that as he was not a resident of Whonnock, he should not interfere or have anything to say on the subject.”

The heated discussion became public knowledge. Service or the lack of it became the issue. Dunn wrote: “Country people as a general rule are slow to complain—will bear a great deal before making trouble—but once roused and put on their defence they will act as others do. They all would like that the thing be arranged quietly, without more to do.” The Reverend Dunn also wrote that “rather than that Mr. Oliver should be postmaster and distribute mail at his house [the people] would have their mail come to Langley and pay old Robbie Robertson a dollar a week to bring it up.”

George A. Smith was nominated postmaster on 1 May 1890. He became the sole owner of the Whonnock Store and a trustee of the Stave River School. In 1894, he replaced Noble Oliver as secretary of the school board. George A. Smith left Whonnock in 1895.

Opposite: A page from the letter written by the Reverend Dunn on 11 January 1890, reporting on the heated argument between Messrs. Oliver, Sampson, and the Reverend Ditcham.



L.C. York and his daughter Gwen in front of the Whonnock Store. This store, that also housed the post office and the telegraph, burned down in 1916 and was not rebuilt. The site is at the foot of today's 269th Street, now under the Lougheed Highway.

Opposite: Mr. and Mrs. L.C. York and their four children on the steps of the living quarters of the Whonnock Store. The gentleman on the right is John Williamson, L.C. York's father-in-law, who left us a diary for 1897. See Whonnock 1897, John Williamson's Diary. Whonnock Notes No. 5, "

L.C. York 1894–1906

IN 1894, L.C. YORK BECAME THE OWNER of the Whonnock general store and postmaster.

In his 1897 diary, John Williamson, York's father-in-law, gives us an impression of life in Whonnock and the extremely busy store in the pioneer years. York was more than a shopkeeper. He was a risk-taking entrepreneur in the prime of his life in the heydays of optimism and unrestrained and uncontrolled speculation. In a few years he became a well-connected and successful businessman and left the store for a comfortable life in Vancouver. In his book *Valley of the Stave*, Charles Miller describes York as a man "who radiated goodwill and hospitality" and who became a firm friend and adviser to his father, Albert Miller.



William Russell 1906–1907

WILLIAM RUSSELL may have been a caretaker of the shop on behalf of L.C. York before the latter sold the shop to R.S. Whiting. The assessment records don't show Russell as an owner of the land.

R.S. Whiting 1907–1953

RICHARD S. WHITING FIGURED PROMINENTLY in the memory of the community. Brian Byrnes used to tell, Whiting was particularly popular with the English settlers in Whonnock.

For the Whonnock Community Association's "Historical Project" in the summer of 1985 Bridget Trask and Karin Sousters interviewed a number of old-timers, and all spent some time talking about the post office and Postmaster Whiting. Following are excerpts from three of those interviews.

JEAN EUSTICE AND HELEN KOLBERG, NOTES FROM INTERVIEW 4 JULY 1985.

Mr. Whiting was the postmaster. The post office was in the store and when the store burnt down and everything with it, mail was given to the train depot laid out on a table. Jean (Black) Eustice worked in the post office in 1923 with Mr. Whiting and when Jean left, Helen (Black) Kolberg took over her post office job. Helen worked in the post office in 1925 when it was broken into. The post office was mocked to a point, because it did not have a proper door—it was just a wooden number with a 2 on it. When Helen came to the post office and discovered it had been broken into she looked around for clues. She found a piece of green yarn stuck on the splinters of the broken door. She labelled it and when the RCMP came to investigate—it was a federal offence against federal property—they took it as an exhibit. On basis of this evidence they located the fellow in Surrey, working in a dairy. Ed Reames was the RCMP inspector who investigated the case.

MARY (DREWRY) ELLIOT, INTERVIEW 25 JULY 1985

Those with keys to boxes could collect their mail any time. Most people came for their mail. Mail went out on the "Agassiz local." The lady working at the time packed the mail and took the mailbag down to meet the train at 9:00 o'clock. You had to be there earlier. If you were lucky, someone was down there with a vehicle of some kind for bringing the mail back for you. If you weren't lucky, well, then you carried it. Newspaper came by mail at night. The post office was always open for about a half hour after the train came in so that people could get their papers; *Sun* and *Province*, *Columbian* once a week, *Haney Gazette*.

Break-ins weren't too difficult to do in those days. Money was kept in a safe at Graham's store [across the road]. At night, when you closed up, no money was left at the post office. Postal notes, money orders and things. The store was broken into but they never managed to get into the safe.

Quite a bit of money went through the post office as everyone ordered from Eatons, Woodward's (the farmer's store—low prices) and Simpson Sears catalogues. Every night the money was put into a safe at Graham's.

MARGARET CAMERON, INTERVIEW 10 JULY 1985

Mr. Whiting was quite a character. He was the station master here. He was treasurer at the church and he was the postmaster. He used to say that he had church money in one pocket and station money in another and post office money in another and he never got into difficulties. He could handle it. My sister always said: "Mr. Whiting has more knowledge than anyone I've ever met." He never made any money. Mrs. Whiting was a delightful person; a great friend of ours. We saw quite a bit of him as he was postmaster and station-master and quite active in the church. He was quite well known around here. He was a very nice man.

We came on the train to begin with [1921] and all transportation was on foot or by horse. Few people had horses—horse and buggy—but my sister didn't. You had to go down to the post office to get the mail and it was quite a walk. You walked through two or three people's properties. The roads as they are now were non-existent. Of course there was no delivery, you went down and got your mail and the only telephone was in that building and Mr. Whiting was postmaster and he employed Isobel Pullen who was there for years.

**STORY OF THE WHONNOCK
P. O. ROBBERY**

Told at First Hand

Between five and six o'clock last Thursday evening two youthful miscreants entered the Whonnock Post Office and carried off, in small cheques, \$22, in cash \$60, and a cheque in favor of a Mr. Cook for \$475. Miss Jean Black, acting postmaster, returned about 7 o'clock to find the damage done. She at once notified Mr. F. W. Showler, whose departmental store is next door, and he, in turn, called up the local Provincial Constable and notified Mr. Cularly of the one in favor of Cook.

Suspicion at once fell on two youth, lately escaped from the Industrial School. It was shrudly guessed that the youths would present at the Hammond Bank early Friday a. m. This was done, i.e., the \$475 cheque was presented at exactly 10:10 by a youth. The Bank manager deferred payment and promptly notified the various constabulary to the end that Chief Porte, Provincial Chief McDonald and a Mountie from the Vancouver F. F. were quickly on the spot, but the miscreants, when the cheque was held up took flight and evidently boarded a west bound freight at 10:15. Doubtless the authorities will soon have the youthful rogues, for, they are known, and this is not their first crime. They left the Industrial School about a year ago. Hoped in next issue to appraise the citizens of their arrest.

The Gazette, 29 January 1925

Memories of a Post Office Assistant

In 1994, Doreen Merrell wrote from her home in Juneau, Alaska, to Brian and Isabel Byrnes: “Probably the best part of our trip was finding you at the Whonnock Post Office where my mother worked so many years ago!” Doreen’s mother was Ethel (Hollinshead) Gillett, who had worked as an assistant for R.S. Whiting in the post office in the 1920s. Doreen Merrell included with her letter some memories Mrs. Gillett had put on paper, including this lively insider’s account of her assignments at the post office in Whonnock.

The catching post was there from the days that L.C. York was postmaster. In John Williamson’s diary is an entry: “August 2, 1897—Fine weather. Mr. Hutchinson and four men putting in a mail catching post opposite the store door.”

Brian Byrnes also remembered the catching post. “We kids would accompany Mr. Whiting to this exciting event. Occasionally the hook on the speeding train would miss and tear the mail bag open causing a shower of letters down the track for about a quarter of a mile; the promised reward of a fraction of a cent per letter ensured the total retrieval of the mail and a great day for us kids.”

MY FIRST JOB WAS IN THE POST OFFICE down on the river front. The C.P.R. tracks ran along the river, serving all the towns—to Vancouver. A paddle-wheel steamer, the *Delta*, made the run from New Westminster once a week, taking passengers, livestock, and freight. When I first started at the post office, the trans-continental trains carried the mail and did not stop at tiny Whonnock. So each morning it was part of my duty to take the locked mail sack (of heavy canvas), down to the track, where I climbed a metal tower, about six or eight feet high. There I hung the mail sack on an arm that swung out to the speeding train, which snatched it when roaring past. At the same time the mail sack for us was flung out, and I had to dodge behind my metal tower to avoid being hit. I was happy that soon the local train, which stopped at every place along the river, started carrying the mail as well as passengers, cans of milk, crates of chickens, and tubs and crates of berries from the surrounding farms to the Vancouver markets.

In the evening the train returned, bringing mail from Vancouver and the Vancouver papers. Of course, meeting that train was the social event of our small community. People congregated to exchange gossip and get the newspapers, and as a courtesy the mail was sorted and given out also. The postmaster was also station agent.

The post office also housed the traveling library—a huge box of books was sent by train, and in our back room we had our library. The books were put on the shelves, and I made out the cards and kept track of them. When people began to complain that they had read all the hundreds of books, I packed them up and a new box arrived. I believe the government provided this service.

As there was no butcher shop at Whonnock, as a courtesy we took meat orders to be sent to the butcher at Mission. He shipped the box of meat packages to us to be handed out to the customers. Then we collected the money to send to the butcher.

Also, ours was the only telephone in Whonnock, so our phone was in a separate booth where people could use it, but I had to collect the fees.

Then too, the Glen Valley (across the muddy Fraser River) mail came through Whonnock, so the sack had to be prepared. A young Japanese man took it across the river in his boat, and returned with their sack of mail. This was no small task in the spring when the river was in flood, with trees and logs, and even houses floating downstream.

During the First World War there was an epidemic of flu, which killed many of our local people. Our postmaster-station agent had a very bad case and was confined to bed for several weeks, during which time I took over his duties as well as my own post office job. I was one busy girl!

I met the morning train (the station was about half a mile from the post office) to get the mail sacks; usually my boy-friend Denny came with his horse and buggy to take me to the station, where I had to write out tickets for passengers and produce, etc. to go on the train. Denny attended to putting it on the train, while I saw to the exchange of mail sacks with the railway mail clerk. Then back to the post office to sort mail and get the Glen Valley bag ready. Then I spent the day writing money orders, giving out mail, and selling stamps, etc. Then home the long mile uphill for my dinner, and back to meet the evening train.

There were many little amusing incidents. There was a colony of Japanese berry farmers west of Whonnock who sent a little, very old, shriveled-up man, who knew no English, to collect the mail. He would come in, grinning his toothless grin, and bow to me. When I handed him the mail, he took an old tin box from his pocket and extracted a pair of glasses without lenses, put them on, and carefully examined the mail (he wanted me to think that he could read). Then he would nod and return his "glasses" to his pocket. I was always amused, and enjoyed his visits.

Brian Byrnes remembered:

In the 1920s and 1930s, Glen Valley had its mail service through Whonnock post office. Mail was rowed over every workday morning after being sorted in Whonnock. Herb Cain of Glen Valley deserves a place in post office history for his unflinching performance of this chore over many years. He never missed.

The Glen Valley post office was in a general store at the corner of Jackman Road, (272nd) and River Road.

Brian sometimes helped out. It was a dangerous chore in winter when the river was frozen and one had to walk across and pick one's way through jagged pieces of ice. The mailbag was tied to a shingle bolt—to avoid that it would get lost—and was dragged over the ice with a rope. One day when Brian arrived at the Glen Valley side the ice collapsed in the centre of the river. A six-to eight-foot rift had formed that he had to cross on the way back, putting himself flat on the ice and crawling. Cold and wet, dragging the mail on the bolt behind him, he made it back to Whonnock. Through binoculars Brian's father had watched him doing this. There were no more mail deliveries for Brian after this incident.

The Whonnock Store Destroyed by Fire



WHONNOCK STORE BURNED.

WHONNOCK, March 15.—Starting, it is believed, from a defective stovepipe, fire broke out early yesterday morning in the store owned by Mr. J. H. Methot, at Whonnock, and within two hours had left nothing but a smouldering pile of ashes. When the flames were first noticed they were in the upper portion of the building, and spread with such rapidity that it was found impossible to get the fire under control. The building also housed the post office for Whonnock and district, but the mail was rescued, although it was impossible to save any of the other contents of the store.

The British Columbian, 21 March 1916,

RICHARD S. WHITING MUST HAVE GROWN TIRED of shop keeping, in particular as he was faced with the competition of Graham's new store on River Road. In 1915, Joseph H. Methot's name showed up in the minutes of the Ladies Club as storekeeper of the Whonnock Store, but it is not clear if he was the owner of the store.

Unusually severe winter weather prevailed in the winter 1915–1916 and temperatures remained well below freezing. Methot had to keep the fires up to avoid the freezing of the merchandise in the store and that may have been the cause that the Whonnock Store building burned down. That happened in the early morning hours of 14 March 1916.

As the newspaper reported, the mail was rescued, and Helen (Black) Kolberg remembered that "Mr. Whiting was the postmaster. The post office was in the store and when the store burnt down and everything with it, mail was given to the train depot laid out on a table." (see page 10)

Joseph H. Methot left Whonnock shortly after the fire.

The Whonnock Post Office On River Road since 1916



This 1926 photo shows the post office on the place where it was built in 1916 by Richard Whiting after the fire destroyed the old Whonnock Store (location now under the Lougheed Highway). Note the narrow space between the post office and Showler's store built in 1919/1920.



A 1950s photo, above, shows the post office as it was replaced in 1932 (?), moved to the west side of the lot, and where we know it today. Byrnes residence in the background.



*Assistant postmaster Margaret Milne, standing in the door of the Whonnock post office. 1920s(?)
Courtesy Maple Ridge Museum & Archives.*

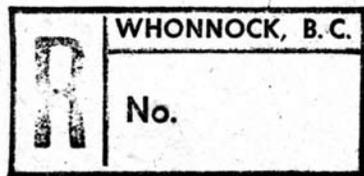
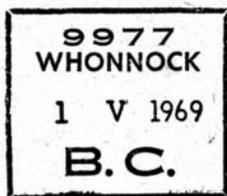
Whonnock or Whonock?

IN 1939, THE GEOGRAPHIC BOARD OF CANADA decided to change the spelling from Whonnock with double "n" to a single "n." The first visible sign was the change of the name on the railway station and many residents blamed the CPR for causing the change. The real reason for the change was to bring the spelling of the name in line with the legal spelling of the name of the Indian Reserve: Whonock with one "n." The post office followed the Board's decision.

When the change of the name became known the residents were up in arms; a number of presentations were made, and a petition was sent to the postal authorities. Ottawa decided to stick to the change, thinking that the residents would eventually accept the revised spelling. They did not.

The war years were not a time to argue such trivia as the spelling of a name. However, the residents remained unhappy and annoyed with the new spelling and many continued using the old spelling with double "n".

In the 1960s a committee of residents resumed the battle. They prepared and presented a well-documented petition to the authorities, signed by most of the residents, and wrote numerous letters. The campaign was effective. In a letter dated 25 February 1969 the Postmaster General confirmed that "the necessary action is being taken to redesignate the Post Office to 'Whonock.'"



First cancellations!

"WHONNOCK" NOW "WHONOCK"

MIRTH and mystery shrouds the changing of the spelling of Whonnock to Whonock—the same place minus an "N".

And while the rest of the community quietly accepts the change, the local wits and uridites lift the quill to spin some thoughts upon the subject.

From the immortal Shakespeare comes the following:

Out dammed "N" OUT! Isay
Why now 'tis time to do it.
What need we fear who know it.
When none can call our power to
account

Yet, Who would have thought Whon-
nock

To have had too many "N's" in it.

and minus "with apologies to Shakespeare".

And 'tis spring and the poetic veins of the community bard stirs to the thought, accepting the challenge, pens thusly:

"Dedicated" to the person responsible for changing the name of our post office to "Whonock".

When you cut up our name why stop at
the "N"

Why not chop out an "O" with the stroke
of a pen.

As "H" may be silent is there any excuse
To have it a moment more, longer in use.

"C" and "K" sound the same, so why not
be slick

And vanish the "C" in your conjuring trick.
So have us all shaven and shorn like a monk

With a name that might suit you, the post
office "WONK".

And while the poet of pens and the wit wags, the history of the name of Whonnock, according to Indian legend, pronounces the name "Wonk".

The name of Whonnock, according to "popular history" is named after Whonnock Creek, where the great white salmon came to spawn.

Whonnock has played an important part in the history of salmon fishing, for up to this point in the Fraser river the quality of the salmon netted is superior to that caught below, and the point has long been known to the Indians for quality fish.

As Whonnock departs, we welcome Whonock the new, new in name, but old in legend and as human nature is slower to change than by an act, the community still remains Whonnock.

The Gazette, 10 March 1939. "I say" was a favourite expression of Richard Whiting.

RURAL MAIL DELIVERY

District Director's Office



Mr. P. Leaf
G. Bill
G. Berghien

Route..... No.....

Whonnoek B6

DEAR SIR:

I beg to acknowledge the receipt from you of the sum of \$4.00 in payment for one Official Rural Mail Box with necessary fittings to be used by you on the route Whonnoek B6 No. 1 which will be forwarded to you as soon as practicable to your address at the Whonnoek P.O.

It must not be removed to another route unless authorized by the said District Whonnoek B6 whom you will please advise in advance, and who will furnish you with form No. 8 R.M.D. to file with the Postmaster of the new distributing office. Kindly have the box placed in position as soon as possible, and when it is ready for service inform the Postmaster of the distributing office at Whonnoek B6. Enclosed is form No. 8 R.M.D. for you to fill out in the upper portion and file with the Postmaster of the distributing office as your request to have mail matter delivered to the courier for deposit in your box.

There is also enclosed a copy of the Rural Mail Delivery Regulations.

NOTICE

The regulations of the Department require that it should be located in such a position on the roadway as to be reached by the courier without leaving the roadway or dismounting from his horse or vehicle.

Yours truly,
C. H. Clarke
District Director

27-R.M.D.-3,000-22-12-36

Our First Rural Route – 1938

UNTIL THE YEARS AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR few households could afford a car. The residents living near the post office would gather daily to collect their mail or daily newspaper, but those living further away had a long walk down to The Front and back. They would perhaps come once a week, combining their visit to the post office with shopping or delivering their produce to the rail station.

In 1938, many living at a distance from the Whonnock post office welcomed rural delivery, even if one had to pay \$4.00 for a post box. The Whonnock rural route included addresses in Albion and Websters Corners.

The document on the opposite page shows that one rural mail box could serve more than one residence—in this case the Leafs, Bells, and the Tiberghiens.

Until 1974 the following “couriers” served R.R. No. 1:

M.R. Charlton	17 January 1938 – 31 December 1945
Robert S. Colbeck	1 January 1946 – 1 October 1946
E.F. Ostman	1 October 1946 – 4 December 1946
Bernard Whiting	4 December 1946 – 30 September 1948
Noel C. Parsons	1 April 1949 – 31 March 1957
Ronald A. Babcock	25 June 1956 – 30 June 1974

In June 1984 the R.R. No. 1 Whonnock was transferred to Maple Ridge “to maintain service.”

[For the] 1938 Rural Route there had to be 100 boxes and that is why it took in part of Websters Corners and part of Albion. Everyone signed up on a petition to have one. Two gentlemen came round and we signed a box and paid for it. Olive Leaf, Interview 1985.

From: “Supplementary Instructions for Erecting Rural Mail Boxes,” 1938:

When empty the box should be turned so that the sides are parallel to the road. This is a notification to the courier that there is no mail matter for him to collect.

When mail has been deposited therein, either by courier or the patron, the box should be turned so that its door faces the road.

The Daniels Dynasty 1953–1986



Future Postmaster Corrine Daniels (later French) is standing on an unpaved River Road with her Watson cousins. Note Graham's store on the right and in the back Luno's store and gas pump. Ca. 1929. Courtesy Trudy DesRochers.



On the left side of the road are the post office and Showler's Store, later Red and White Store. Who is the little girl with her dog? Courtesy Maple Ridge Museum and Archives.

AFTER ALMOST HALF A CENTURY of Richard S. Whiting, Ralph and Willadee “Nana” Daniels and their family were postmasters from 1953 until 1986, with a year-long interruption when Marietta Davis was postmaster. Corrine French was Ralph and Willadee’s daughter and Mark DesRochers was Corinne’s son-in-law.

Little has been published or otherwise recorded about their time as postmasters. Around 1985, at the end of their service as postmasters, clouds started gathering. After a century the Whonnock post office’s survival was threatened as reflected in the following comments by Margaret Cameron in an interview in 1985:

And then the Daniels. You see, somebody owns the building. I think the Daniels still own the building actually. Of course Corinne is their daughter and her son-in-law [Mark DesRochers] is really the postmaster. We haven’t had too many [postmasters] but they stay a long time. Bernhard Whiting ran it for a while. The Daniels had it for years and years. See, Ralph is the same age as I am, 85, so I don’t know when he retired from the post office. But it has not changed much, that little post office. But of course the service comes all from Haney now and we are on a rural route, which we never had before. The post office was quite a centre of things, you know. But I don’t think it is going to be for long, this. ...

I am afraid that the days of the Whonnock post office are slightly numbered because now the mail is all sorted in Haney and it is on rural route. I was talking to Corinne the other day and she said: “Well, we are still here,” but I think that they want to fade out the post office if they can.

Lila Timmins 1986–1994

In 1988 Brian Byrnes put together “A Short history of the Whonnock Post Office” to support the efforts of an action group, Dignity of Canada, which tried to save our small post offices. After her retirement from the Whonnock post office, Lila Timmins prepared a printed version of Brian’s text, adding the following text describing her worrisome years as postmaster.

The Rural Route of Whonnock (a contracted mail delivery service, which served the area beyond the ½-mile boundary around the post office), was moved from the Whonnock post office in 1985. It is currently being done from the Maple Ridge post office. This was done apparently with the understanding that Canada Post would soon be closing the old post office down. I was told that the old building just didn’t have the image that Canada Post wanted to portray.

I bought the post office very privately in 1986, not quite understanding why the sale went through so fast, and being “sworn in” so to speak, was very brief (all of 5 min. or so) and I had myself a job. I’m still not sure why Canada Post wanted it closed, although they had no choice but to keep it open after a new postmaster was initiated. So they waited.

I had two maternity leaves and each time I had another baby my superior would say: “So, you probably won’t be back...we had better start making arrangements.”

After eight years and raising four young girls, I, somewhat regretfully, sent in my resignation. When this took place in early January 1994, it was suggested to me to hold on to my resignation for one month to have a clear understanding of how to go about the arrangements, as the new Liberal Government was about to make some changes. They did.

There is now a moratorium on the closures of rural post offices across Canada. The position of postmaster of the Whonnock post office was gratefully and happily passed on to Sue Schulze, also the proprietor of McFly’s Feed that is run (by phone orders) through the building next door to the post office, also known as the old “Red & White.”

In 1984, the Progressive Conservatives, led by Brian Mulroney, were elected and governed the nation for the next decade; they closed down 1,500 rural post offices and planned to shut down more. The Whonnock post office was threatened. In 1994 the Liberals imposed a moratorium on rural post office closures.

WHONNOCK POSTMASTERS

Noble Oliver	1885 – 1890
Geo. A. Smith	1890 – 1894
L.C. York	1894 – 1906
William Russell	1906 – 1907
R.S. Whiting	1907 – 1953
Ralph S. Daniels	1953 – 1968
Willadee Daniels	1969 – 1973
Corinne French	1973 – 1975
Mark DesRochers	1975 – 1979
Marietta Davis	1979 – 1980
Mark DesRochers	1980 – 1986
Lila Timmins	1986 – 1994
Sue Schulze	1994 –

Story by Chris Campbell
Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows
Times, 9 February 1993.



Timmins hand-franks out-going mail with the post office hammer. In an automated world, she says, "This is what really sets the post office apart."
 Photo by Chuck Russell.

Post-dated history

"When you walk into the post office, you walk into a piece of history..." On those rare winter mornings when the temperature slips just enough and the wind has yet to rise from its slumber, a bank of thick fog will stretch itself across the Lougheed Highway.

Motorists along this desolate piece of road, expanded to four lanes but sparsely travelled nonetheless, forge their way east only to plunge and disappear into a murky sea of vapor.

Emerging on the other side of this haze commuters leave behind Maple Ridge's cluttered urban subdivisions and step into the past, where the hamlet of Whonnock clings to life.

The landmarks that identify Whonnock used to be so recognizable to passers-by, but those historical fingerprints are fading fast from the eyes and evaporating into memory.

The towering presence of the Whonnock Lumber water tower was felled last year, a black Sunday for those who witnessed it drop to the ground. Most old businesses have long since shut down. Travelers have a hard time telling if they're coming or going in this rural outpost.

One milestone, however, does remain standing but this one begs close attention to even spot it. Lapse concentration for a moment and the anonymous confines of the Whonnock Post Office will whisk past you and into the rear-view mirror.

The ancient brown building, its outer walls tangled up in gnarled vines, looks more like a storage shed for farm implements than a place the mail arrives through rain, snow, sleet or dark of night.

Only a small red sign emblazoned with the postal code VOM ISO distinguishes the building as anything more than where a farmer hangs tools.

That sign, and the post office it hangs from, are a few of the remaining pulses in the Whonnock name, which is the heart of a community's identity.

Amid diminishing local landmarks, the post office remains a thriving daily meeting place, run with down-home charm by Lila Timmins, resident and postmaster for eight years.

"I know the importance of this place," Timmins says. "It's a lifeline, a place that people here can call their own. I'm the caretaker of their correspondence. Not many people are lucky enough to get this close to their neighbors." Timmins is just the 12th post master since

Whonnock got a post office in about 1885. The old building burnt down and a new one was built in 1911 at 272 Street on, well, a postage stamp piece of land. "If the hedge next to us grows any more, we'll have to relocate," Timmins jokes. "Inside isn't much better. There's no tour here; this is it. One little room, jammed with stuff." To be postmaster Timmins was required to buy the land and the building—in effect buying herself a job. But she was also handed the torch of a community's desire to keep the service rural and close to home, complete with its own postmark.

The one-room post office feels as warm as your grandparent's parlor at Christmas. Neighbors drop by to pick up stamps and scraps of gossip, instead of a cup of sugar. Timmins' young children do homework at her side while she sorts the mail. Among the 138 clients is a recurring cast of characters, like Willadee Daniels, called Nana to her friends, who visits for a fistful of stamps, and to regale the days during the 1950s and '60s when she ran the post office with her late husband Ralph. "Not much has changed here since my day," Nana tells Timmins, poking her head through the tiny, square office window. "It's still busy, and still friendly. I think that's the way people like it to stay."

Nana's right: surprisingly little has changed in 83 years. The mail is still sorted by hand in a rustic old cubicle kept toasty by a small baseboard heater. The Whonnock postmark is whacked onto envelopes with an inked wooden hammer handed down from postmaster to postmaster since the 1940s. The minute metal letters are changed by hand for each address.

"The people, the sign outside and the hammer—three things that were here before me and must be treated with the upmost respect," Timmins says. "You mess with any of those and the place just wouldn't be the same." That old wooden hammer has symbolic power as well. When the hammer falls on an envelope, it stamps the fact the mail came from rustic Whonnock and not the city of Maple Ridge.

The name is a vital resource for residents. In 1969, 588 signatures went on a petition demanding restoration of the name Whonnock, which due to an error was renamed Whonock with only one N.

Such fights are worth it to keep the Whonnock name beating strong, not lying dead in some textbook.

"There's a history here," says resident Brenda Balachsan. "When you walk into the post office, you walk into a piece of that history. It's alive; a part of us. I'm always afraid someone's going to close it down because of some budget decision. Believe me; it's worth the money to have your own post office. It's something to call our own."

The post office's stamp, which Timmins says is at least 35 years old. Photo by Chuck Russell.



Sue Schulze 1994–

SUE SCHULZE CAME TO WHONNOCK IN 1981 and, as she says, “instantly fell in love with the place.”

She bought and restored the former Red and White store in 1992 and started a home-based hay and feed business called McFly’s, after her Jack Russell terrier.

A few years later, she jumped at the opportunity to become the owner of the Whonnock post office and postmaster—one of a few in the Lower Mainland, who still carry that title. She likes to explain that the Whonnock post office is a true post office and not a franchise and that her boss is in Vancouver.



As she did with the store, she loved to bring the old post office back to life and to learn about its history. She arranged that the store and the post office were entered in the Heritage Register of the District of Maple Ridge. In 2000, both buildings were distinguished by the Maple Ridge Community Heritage Commission with a heritage plaque.

Sue Schulze is devoted to her work as postmaster, even if it involves more work than people can imagine. She loves to interact with people. “Only if you like people you can do this job,” she says. Sue is proud of the important role “her” post office plays in keeping our small community together.

Her enthusiasm is inspiring.



July 2005





SIMONE PONNE/News staff

Postmaster Sue Schultz at the Whonnock post office, with the original cancellation mark denoting Whonnock, home of the humpback salmon.

Symbol of Whonnock part of the postmark

BY PHIL MELNYCHUK
STAFF REPORTER

For Whonnockians near and far, now there's no mistaking a letter from home.

Thanks to Sue Schulze, postmaster at Whonnock post office, the area has its own postmark, showing a humpbacked pink salmon, the symbol of the area.

"It's just something that I thought would be nice for the community," Schulze said Monday.

"That's what we want out here is to keep our identity."

The name Whonnock comes from the Coast Salish word translated as "Place of the Humpback Salmon", referring to the deformity of pink salmon at spawning time. Schulze, who's been postmaster since 1994, based the postmark on the Whonnock Community Association's logo. She asked her supervisor Tammy Strangward if Whonnock post office could have its own cancellation stamp, Strangward put the wheels in motion and a few

weeks ago it arrived.

The original Whonnock logo is featured on a wooden sign at the Whonnock Lake community centre. The stylized salmon with native decoration on the tail was created by Brenda Guild Gillespie, an artist whose technical illustrations of fish species have been used in textbooks.

Canada Post will create cancellation marks for special occasions, as a service to stamp collectors and to recognize unique communities.

However, the cancellation mark doesn't go on every item of mail leaving the post office, said Schulze. Customers have to ask for it specifically if they want it on a letter, otherwise the stamp would quickly wear out. But she's been getting lots of requests.

"It's really nice. It's quite pretty.

"If it was on a letter you'd notice it."

Whonnock post office has been on the site on River Road, just off Lougheed Highway at 272nd Street since 1885. The current version of the post office has been there since 1940.

Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows News, Saturday October 18, 2003

Richard R. Whiting's Letter of appointment as postmaster of Whonnock. The information from the Library and Archives of Canada shows the commencement date 1 December 1907.



Letter of Appointment to Postmastership.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT, CANADA.

Ottawa, *28th February 1908.*

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that the Postmaster General has been pleased to appoint you to be Postmaster of *Whonnock* in the Electoral County of *New Westminster* in the Province of *British Columbia* and Dominion of Canada.

You are, therefore, hereby authorized to exercise all the functions and discharge all the duties appertaining to the said office, according to law.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,


Deputy Postmaster General.

Mr. R. S. Whiting
Whonnock
New Westminster

6-1201147.

RC

MORE WHONNOCK NOTES

1. *Transcripts from the Fraser Valley Record (1908-1912)*
News about Whonnock in the Mission newspaper
2. *Cemeteries in Whonnock*
The history of Whonnock's cemeteries
—includes cemetery records and transcriptions of the grave markers
3. *The Trondheim Congregation*
Our Norwegian settlers—minutes of the Lutheran Church in Whonnock
4. *Through the Eyes of Brian and other Friends*
Interviews, notes, and stories dating back to 1913
5. *Whonnock 1897 —John Williamson's Diary*
One of the oldest records of daily life in Whonnock
6. *Ferguson's Landing: George Godwin's Whonnock*
A look at George Godwin's novel: *The Eternal Forest*
7. *Robert Robertson and Tselatsetenate*
Whonnock's Scottish first settler and his family
8. *A Name Index of the Whonnock Notes Series No. 1-7*
Compiled by Eleanore Dempster
9. *A Name Index of the Whonnock Community Association
Historical Project Summer 1985 Records*
Compiled by Eleanore Dempster
10. *The Family of Catherine & Edward Julius Muench*
Catherine was the sister of the wife of Robert Robertson
11. *It Was a Wonderful Life, Brian and Isabel Byrnes*
Brian and Isabel gave all to Whonnock

HOW TO GET COPIES OF WHONNOCK NOTES

Free copies are now available for download at our Web site <www.whonnock.ca>.

Sue Schulze continues to have a stock of all *Whonnock Notes* handy at the Whonnock post office, providing easy access to anyone who would like to buy a copy. We owe her thanks for doing this—and much more—for the promotion of the history and heritage of Whonnock.

If you are not planning a visit to the Whonnock post office to get your *Whonnock Notes* please order from Fred Braches, PO Box 130, Whonnock BC V2W 1V9. Phone (604) 462-8942. E-mail: braches@whonnock.bc.ca

Also available *Records of the Whonnock Community Association's Historical Project, 1985.*