

# A walk through time... 1936-1945

**The War Years.** Although the conflict of World War II may seem to us very far away from the peaceful Comox Valley, at the time it touched Courtenay residents in very direct, and sometimes tragic ways. Many served overseas, and the names of those who died were added to those of the First World War on the Sandwich Memorial Cairn on Mission Hill. Combined Operations training exercises for the D-Day landings were carried out in the local area, and the vessels used in the exercises were stored in the Courtenay River slough near what is now Simms Park, while the sailors of the Royal Canadian Navy's Fisherman's Reserve who operated them had their barracks in Lewis Park. Commemorative plaques can now be seen in both parks. An army camp was built on the land that is now the site of Vanier School, and troops in army and naval uniforms were a frequent sight in town. Conscientious objectors to the war were also a presence, working on farms and forestry projects in the area.

People at home contributed to the war effort too, with many war-related drives and projects. Even the children joined in, picking blackberries for the "Jam for Britain" project. In 1945, 3400lb. of jam, made from donated fruit, was sent to Great Britain. A glimpse into wartime thinking can be seen in a young Roberts Smith walking on his way to school and noticing the large group of Japanese-Canadian residents, many in tears, outside what is now the White Whale restaurant, waiting to be deported far from the coast.

## TAMING THE COURTENAY RIVER

Since the area surrounding the Courtenay River was growing in population and use, there was public outcry for some method of controlling the river to prevent flooding of the low lying areas. The natural course of the river was causing the erosion of Lewis Park, which was now being developed. During peak water flows, caused by extreme weather conditions & high tides, severe flooding occurred. Following considerable study and investigation and lobbying all levels of government, the decision was made to install wooden plank cribbing on either side of the Courtenay River from its beginning (the confluence of the Tsolum and Puntledge Rivers) to a point approximately where the Slough met the river. This project commenced in 1937. It proved to be a great success although it did not completely eliminating flooding under certain weather conditions. The dredging of the Courtenay River up to the 5th St. bridge also helped to control the water and enabled ships and barges to travel upstream with their cargo.

Over the years, the wooden planking rotted and it became necessary to replace the entire cribbing. Stan Janzen, then Superintendent of Public Works for the City, in consultation with other authorities and engineers, devised a "concrete binwall" which they constructed in sections. This project commenced in 1977 and was complicated by weather and tides. The river is no longer dredged due Environmental & Fisheries Regulations.



Flooding in the 1930s | Courtenay & District Museum, 989.10.4



Concrete Cribbing which replaced earlier wooden cribbing in the 1970s | City of Courtenay



Miss Beatty - Courtenay's first public health nurse initiated by the Rotary Club | Courtenay High School Yearbook



"C" Co. Canadian Scottish Regiment, c. 1937 | T. Dennis photo as shown in "Land of Plenty" by Isenor, McClinnis, Stephens & Watson

## THE RISE OF SERVICE CLUBS

The contribution of Fraternal Orders and Service Clubs to the welfare and betterment of the people of Courtenay and District cannot be overemphasized. Prior to the City's incorporation, there were four Fraternal Orders volunteering in the district: The Masons, Orange Lodge, International Order of Oddfellows, and Knights of Pythias. In the early 1920's, The Native Sons Assembly No. 3 & Canadian Daughters League, and the Elks Lodge commenced. In the late 1930's, The Soroptimists, Rotary International, Rotary Anns, Kinsmen and Kinettes began, and in the 1940's the Kiwanis, Fraternal Order of Eagles, and Lions Club were formed. In addition there were local groups such as the Women's Institute and the Comox Agricultural Society. The Mission statements and Visions of these many groups all reflect humanitarian and community service efforts.

The people of Courtenay and surrounding district remain the beneficiaries of these many contributions, as well as thousands of people in distant lands where these groups have shared funds, materials and volunteer labour. For most

of the century these service clubs and fraternities have accepted responsibilities to provide: transportation for the sick to special treatment clinics; affordable housing for the elderly and low income families; funding towards senior care facilities; much needed food and supplies for people in areas suffering from natural disasters and effects of war; playground equipment and parks throughout the community; funds and personnel for local entertainment projects; funds to fight Polio, Cystic Fibrosis, TB, Cancer and other disease or medical needs.

Our famous Native Sons Hall is just one legacy in memory of their hard work in community building. Whenever there was a need to support community events such as the CRA, hosting BC Summer Games or other sporting events, Skattered Skits, Commercial Ball Leagues, or parades, many of these groups willingly participated. If sponsors were needed, there they were with the funds and people to help.

Hats off to each one!



Photo: Fisherman's Reserve Barracks in Lewis Park | Contributed by L. Burns

Population: 1,737 (in 1941)

Map above shows the City boundary during this era.

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Street names within Courtenay were historically given by the developer and Highways officials. The names were usually family names associated with the owners (McPhee, Wallace, Judson, Pidcock or Alice) or identified the geographical location or direction of the street (Courtenay Ave., River St., Union Bay Rd., Cumberland Rd., Union St.).



Old Subdivision Plan Showing Original Street Names

In the early days, houses were not numbered so navigation in the city could be tricky.

Records going back to October 1931, indicate the sensitivity of the proposed street name change. Newspaper articles include "uproar", "unpopular", "angry delegations to council" when reporting on efforts to initiate a systematic plan for renaming streets and giving house or property numbers. Several attempts were made and in the 1940's a special committee formed of Alderman Geoff Browning and Sid Williams was tasked with exploring the best system. The two took the job very seriously, consulting with the public and other districts. Early suggestions of Trees, or Numbers, East and West were dismissed by citizens. Finally, a plan was formulated - streets running East and West would be numbered, commencing with 1st St. at the Puntledge River and moving south to the City Boundary (21st St.). Avenues running North and South, would be given pioneer family names, commencing alphabetically at the Courtenay River moving west to the City boundary (Willemar Ave.).

On December 14, 1944 the Streets Naming Referendum was put to the Taxpayers. It passed with a majority. Subsequently, Bylaw No. 500 was adopted by City Council on September 17, 1945. From that time on the house numbering and new street names were maintained, and as the City boundaries expanded, attempts were made to follow the same directions. Over the years deviations have occurred when roads cross municipal borders or where regional district areas were annexed as the Regional numbers and names were kept.



Sandwich Army Camp, 1943 (now Vanier School) | National Archives of Canada



Gasoline Ration Coupon Book



Army Trainees, 1943 | M. Egger photo as shown in 'Land of Plenty' by Isenor, McClinnis, Stephens & Watson

<p>COFFER DAM CONSTRUCTED IN SLOUGH TO MAINTAIN WATER LEVELS @ LOW TIDE</p> <p>1936</p> <p>COURTENAY ROTARY CLUB STARTS</p>	<p>FOURSQUARE CHURCH STARTS</p> <p>1937</p> <p>WOODEN CRIBBING INSTALLED ALONG COURTENAY RIVER</p>	<p>CANADIAN MARTYRS ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH STARTED (NOW OLD CHURCH THEATRE)</p> <p>1938</p> <p>LARGE FOREST FIRE EXTENDED TO OUTSKIRTS OF COURTENAY. Those who were fleeing the fire were housed in Courtenay.</p>	<p>KINSMEN CLUB &amp; KINETTES STARTED</p> <p>1939</p> <p>COMOX VALLEY MEN &amp; WOMEN ENLISTED FOR WAR SERVICE</p>	<p>E.W. THEATRE OPENS (LATER PALACE THEATRE) First movie shown was "BOOM TOWN"</p> <p>1940</p> <p>FIRST PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE ARRIVES. Initiated &amp; supported by Rotary Club</p>	<p>PIERCY'S FUNERAL HOME OPENS</p> <p>1941</p> <p>NEW TELEPHONE OFFICE @ CORNER OF 8TH AND CLIFFE</p> <p>CANADIAN GOVERNMENT BOUGHT 165 ACRES OF SAM PIERCY'S FARM FOR AN ARMY CAMP. Site of Present Day Vanier School.</p>	<p>JAPANESE RESIDENTS SENT TO INTERNMENT CAMPS IN BC'S INTERIOR</p> <p>1942</p> <p>ROYAL CANADIAN FISHERMAN'S RESERVE COMBINED OPERATIONS TRAINING</p>	<p>AIRPORT BUILT TO BE PART OF COMMONWEALTH AIR TRAINING PROGRAM (DE-ACTIVATED IN 1945)</p> <p>1943</p> <p>SOROPTIMISTS CLUB FORMS</p>	<p>STREETS RENAMED &amp; HOUSES NUMBERED FOR 1ST TIME</p> <p>1944</p> <p>MAY 5, VE DAY &amp; AUG 14 VJ DAY CELEBRATIONS</p>	<p>1945</p>
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