

A walk through time... 1946-1955

Post War Boom. A rapid increase in the City's population led to the development of new civic facilities, new schools and the founding of the Courtenay Recreation Association (CRA). Evidence of this era is still visible on the streets of Courtenay today and in the continued rich diversity of recreational programs and activities on offer.

HERB BRADLEY AND THE GROWTH OF THE COURTENAY RECREATION ASSOCIATION

Following the War, a group of men and women came together energized by the desire to support programs to meet the recreational needs of local citizens, particularly youth. Numerous recreational activities had been taking place in the schools and privately, but the vision of putting many heads together and providing leadership and guidance inspired the group. It was a combination of locals and new residents who made the CRA one of the most outstanding recreational organizations in Canada.

The Courtenay Athletic Association was formed following the Native Sons' donation of proceeds from the July 1, 1944 activities. It later became the Courtenay Recreational Association (CRA) in October 1946, and was based in the Native Sons Hall.

Herb Bradley arrived as Recreational Director in November, 1946 with outstanding credentials. This proved to be a key decision as Herb's dedication and commitment to the youth of the district could never be matched. He was a perfect fit, loved everything he did and taught, was a leader, and expressed his compassion for each one, both in word and deed. Whenever the activities



Herb Bradley, 1974



Opening of the Outdoor Pool in 1949 | Contributed by L. Burns

COLOURFUL CHARACTERS: WONG CHEE

Courtenay residents treasure many memories of "Characters" who made their presence known throughout the city. One such character was Wong Chee. He was Chinese by birth and a hard worker. Several businesses hired Wong to do custodial and other handy man work. He was also known to do considerable gambling.

Residents were accustomed to the sight of Wong riding his bicycle down the middle of 5th St. with loud shouts or screaming evil sounding imprecations if you didn't get out of the way! Often found in the middle of the Cliffe Ave and 5th St. intersection, he voluntarily directed traffic using the same vocabulary. Tourists found him irresistible.

Mrs. Stubbs aptly describes his dress and behaviour. "Wong was a man, impatient with stupidities. Forthright and positive in his own affairs, he gave vociferous voice to his opinions of fumbling indecisive people, particularly motorists and straggling pedestrians. He often displayed his love for colourful clothes wearing four hats and an assortment of shirts, sweaters and scarves. His collection of headgear was endless, from goggled helmets to toques to naval caps, swim caps, dashing fedoras, railway caps, plaid tams. Wong believed in 'the layered look' He was part of our lives, and we were saddened when we heard of his death from a large overhead door falling on him, with nobody around to respond to his cries for help".



Wong Chee | Courtenay & District Museum, Stubbs Collection



CENTRE: Logging Train Moving Through Town | Mountain Timber by R.S. Mackie BOTTOM: Enrollment exceed capacity so some school classes were held in the old barracks | Courtenay & District Museum, 990.68.24



of the CRA are described, Herb's mark is on them.

Blessed with outstanding directors and leaders, the growth of the CRA was immediate with many other groups becoming affiliates. Fundraising was a necessary part of operations and over the years the CRA had a series of creative fundraising events. One of these was "Skattered Skits", which became famous in all circles.

The CRA continued to expand. In August 1947, the CRA moved into the Agricultural Hall in Lewis Park. Weekly bingos were held to help raise funds along with special gym displays and circuses. Swimming became a prime activity and Herb wished to commence swimming lessons in the summer of 1947. A few instructors were trained and the lessons were held at Maple Pool, on the Tsolum river. Again fundraising activities were held to raise sufficient money to commence construction of an outdoor pool in Lewis Park. The pool was opened July 1, 1949 with cold water from the Tsolum River, but by 1954 heating equipment was installed.

Hundreds of people were involved in the CRA and again it became necessary to expand the facilities, which was done in 1958 and several times in succeeding years. The CRA has changed with the times, but has always kept its goal in mind. Herb retired many years ago and since passed away, but many other Directors and leaders continue to do an excellent job. Records show third and fourth generations of kids that have been and still are involved.



Kinsmen Production for Skattered Skits | Free Press Photo as shown in CRA Kaleidoscope



Population: 2,553 in 1951
Map above shows the City boundary during this era.

1950's Street Scene | Image I-27471 Courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives

CIVIC FACILITIES



Courthouse built in 1952 also housed police station | Courtenay & District Museum, 991.138.8

Former police station was renovated in the tudor style by architect A.W. Rigger to become the new City Hall in 1953. It was destroyed by fire in 1995 and City Hall was moved to its present location.

In a land swap, the City gained the old police station and renovated it for the new City Hall, and the province received land on Cumberland Road for a new Courthouse pictured above. The old City Hall and fire hall site on 6th and Duncan was demolished and a new 5 bay fire hall was built which operated until 2000. During the demolition and reconstruction process, Mr. Ted Williamson, City gardener, rescued a beautiful Magnolia tree and transplanted it at 750 Cliffe Ave, where it still stands near City Hall.

SCHOOLS BURSTING AT THE SEAMS

A vivid illustration of the rapidly expanding population of Courtenay can be seen in school construction after the war. The new School District #71 was organized in 1946. It had an overcrowded High School, with classes being held in random locations - the parish hall, the army camp officers' quarters, and others. In 1952 Comox High School closed and its students came to Courtenay, adding to the overcrowding. Courtenay Elementary School, later called Courtenay Central, was the only elementary school in town and faced similar problems. New facilities were desperately needed. A south wing, including a gymnasium, was added to the High School in 1953. In the same year, Courtenay West Elementary School opened on McPhee Avenue - the current Courtenay Elementary School. In 1955 Lake Trail School opened. It was built as an elementary school, but the very next year changed to a junior high. Although the original Courtenay Elementary closed in 1960, the following decade echoed the growth trend, with Glacier View Elementary built in 1956 and expanded in 1959, additions made to Courtenay West Elementary in 1960 and 1964, Arden Elementary built and expanded in 1962, and Puntledge Park Elementary built in 1964 and expanded in 1966.

1946 EARTHQUAKE

At 10:15 a.m. on Sunday 23rd June 1946, Courtenay suffered a 30 second earthquake which registered 7.3 on the Richter scale. At the time, it was the worst earthquake to be experienced in Canada. Had it lasted even 2 seconds longer there would have been great devastation. Like an underground train it left a trail of fallen bricks from chimneys. The facing on the Courtenay post office fell to the street. The Dyke road was split. The chimney on the roof of Central School fell through to the desks in the grade 8 classroom and caused damage to a primary classroom. Had it been a weekday, there would have been 60 students in the senior class and 35 in the primary grade. Happily, throughout the valley there was no loss of life nor injury to any person.



Damage to School and Post Office from Earthquake | Courtenay & District Museum, 972.54.2 and 2004.10.1

