

A walk through time... 1956-1965

The Modern City Emerges. With a population approaching 4000 and still within its original boundaries, Courtenay now acquires a sewer system, concrete sidewalks and the current 5th Street bridge. The first multi-family apartments appear, and Kiwanis Village might be called the first patio home development.

GROWTH AND CHANGE

Until this decade, Courtenay was a community of single-family dwellings – individual houses, each with its own plot of land. But change was in the air, and in 1956 Courtenay's first set of apartments was built by Nick Willychuck on 14th Street, at Grieve Avenue. Later, the first of Robert Ash's apartments, built by Robert Ash Sr., opened in 1965 at the corner of 12th Street and Fitzgerald Avenue. These early apartments, still there today, were mostly modest 4- and 6-plexes. Then a different kind of multi-family development happened in 1960-61, with the formation of the Kiwanis Village Society and the building of the first phase of Kiwanis Village for seniors at Pidcock Avenue and 8th Street; a concept similar to patio homes. Today, patio homes and apartments are a normal sight in all parts of Courtenay, and because apartment buildings are at present generally no more than 4 storeys high, the skyline of the city is only gently changed.



Aerial View of Courtenay | Courtenay & District Museum, 989.35.1



Courtenay's First Apartment Building Built in 1956



5th Street Looking East | Courtenay & District Museum, 989.89.17

Population: 3,485 (in 1961)

THE CHRISTMAS TREE, BILLY BROWNE & SANTA CLAUS

In 1959, Billy Browne "came on air" when he opened his radio station CFCP. Each morning he would begin his programme with "It's another beautiful morning in the Comox Valley". The next year he started the Christmas season with a new tradition – the lighting of a Christmas Tree in the middle of Fifth street and England. Santa Claus would arrive on a fire truck to light the tree and hand out candy canes. Then every weekday morning until Christmas, Santa would go into the studio to read aloud some of the letters he had received. Billy Browne also initiated the Christmas Cheer Fund.



Santa Arriving on Fire Truck | Courtesy of Courtenay Fire Department.

SID WILLIAMS

When Sid Williams was honoured as Freeman of the City it was noted that he had been 24 years on Council, Chairman of every civic committee, supporter of the CRA, the outdoor Memorial Pool, restoration of the Civic Theatre and of all Forbidden Plateau activities. He began his theatrical career at age 7 when asked to participate in a school production. He would learn all aspects of theatre work while helping with Skattered Skits. As an amateur gold prospector he was perfect for the role of Centennial Sam, the ambassador/ mascot for the 1958 Provincial Centennial. He had for many years been a member of the Barkerville Players but took that year off to tour the province. He would resurrect the role in 1967 for Canada's Centennial. His community activities and his role as Centennial Sam were recognized in 1984 when he received an Order of Canada. That same year the Civic Theatre was renamed the Sid Williams Theatre, affectionately known as "the Sid".



Century Sam, Sid Williams | Bill Lamb Photo, Courtenay Argus, Stubbs Collection at Courtenay & District Museum



Sid Williams Collecting Money for Wading Pool c1959 | CRA Kallidoscope, Herb Bradley Collection.



Myrtle Vickberg & Dan Campbell during 1967 Inner Tube Race | Comox District Free Press Collection at Courtenay & District Museum

MYRTLE VICKBERG

While some women gather children to their bosom, Myrtle Eleanor Vickberg gathered organizations for which she worked as tirelessly as any mother would for her children. She was never just as member, or an executive officer, she became the driving force, combining her special charm with no-nonsense business acumen. Over the years she worked for the Historical Society, the Soroptomists, Canadian Cancer Society, Professional Women's Club, Mental Health Association, Big Brothers, and the Social Credit Constituency Association. She was Manager of the Credit Union, the first woman to be elected to Courtenay City Council. She was listed in the Who's Who of BC and received the Confederation Medal of Service to the Nation. She was for many years chair of the July 1st celebrations and chairman of all three Centennials: B.C in 1958, Canada in 1967 and again for BC in 1971. She was honoured by the K'omox First Nation when given the title of Princess Kimalus, "Someone to whom we can go". Her antics for several July 1st celebrations were outrageous delighting holidayers. In 1967 she went down the Puntledge in a rubber tube, arriving before her rivals MLA Dan Campbell and Base Commander K. Lett. The race was always "fixed", Myrtle was always the winner.



One of the highlights of the July 1 parade were the floats manufactured by the White Bros Machine Shop. Each of the entries were self-propelled and depicted a well known headline from that year such as: Sputnik the Flying Saucer, Blackball Ferry and Ripple Rock which exploded at intervals! Some of these crowd pleasers were featured at the PNE and even the Toronto Grey Cup parade.



BC Lions Training at Lewis Park | Contributed by L. Burns.



Bridge replacement 1959



Two Spot Locomotive | Contributed by L. Burns



City Marina | Contributed by L. Burns.

