

The 102nd Battalion

"The official date for the mobilization of the 102nd Canadian Infantry Battalion"... whose role in Canada, England, France and Belgium during the days of the Great War was significant... "is given as November 3rd, 1915, on which date authority was issued to Lieut. Colonel John Weightman Warden, formerly of St. John's, N.B., but then of Vancouver, B.C., to raise a battalion for service overseas, this battalion to be raised in Northern British Columbia and to be styled the 102nd (Comox-Atlin) Overseas Battalion. A newspaper story... states that the inauguration of the unit was the outcome of a wager laid between Mr. H. Clements, M.P. for Comox-Atlin, and one of his colleagues in the Federal House, the latter having jestingly challenged him to produce a unit from his barren constituency. If there be any truth in the yarn it certainly affords an excellent example of the adage that from small beginnings great things do grow." -- Excerpt from Sergeant Leonard McLeod Gould, Victoria B.C. Journalist

www.102mdbattalioncefc.ca



Photographer: Walter Gage Sr.
CDM 972.55.6



Photographer: Walter Gage Sr.
CDM 972.260.2



Photographer: Walter Gage Sr.
CDM 999.174.18

Initially called the "North British Columbians", the unit was renamed the 102nd Battalion in 1917 and was comprised of men from throughout British Columbia. Training took place at Goose Spit near Comox and Battalion Headquarters was established in Victoria.

The "Spit", part of the K'omoks First Nations traditional lands, had been used as a range in the days when the Imperial Navy was stationed in Esquimalt until the early 1900s and traces of their maneuvers remained when the 102nd began their training. Shelter conditions were harsh for the new recruits with the winter of 1915 bringing a bitter cold to the campgrounds. Blankets and clothing were scarce; forcing the men to make do with what little they had.

The Battalion remained in Canada until June 10th, 1916 when they embarked on a voyage to England from Halifax aboard the "Empress of Britain". At this time, the 102nd was 968 men strong with 37 officers present. The Battalion participated in a number of prominent campaigns in France and Flanders in the following years: Somme and Ancre Heights in 1916, Arras, Ypres and Vimy Ridge in 1917 as well as Hill 70 and Passchendaele. The Battalion played a major role in deciding the battles at Amiens, Scrape, Drocourt-Quéant, Canal du Nord, "The Hindenburg Line" and Valenciennes. The unit disbanded on September 15, 1920.

Child's Play



Threshing on Crawford Farm, c. 1900.
Stubbs collection at CDM

Even young children would have been expected to do small-sized adult chores. If they lived on a farm, those chores might include milking cows, collecting eggs or helping in the fields. There was always plenty of work to do around the house like scrubbing laundry on the washboard, taking care of younger siblings or weeding the vegetable garden.



Mrs. Childs (nee Finley) with son Robert, 1906.
CDM 994.11.1



1922 School pageant.
Stubbs collection at CDM

What would life have been like for children in the Comox Valley about one hundred years ago? Most days would have been a mix of school, work and play.

School days would have involved more than just the three Rs (reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic). Pioneer descendant Robert H. Pidcock attended the Oyster River School in the 1920s. He recalled that *"the school was heated by a barrel stove that took cord wood 3' [feet] long. It was the duty of the older boys to take turns getting enough wood in for a whole day. These boys also took turns stoking the fire while classes were in session. The older girls cleaned the blackboard, brushes and swept the floor everyday after school."*



Children at play in Comox, c. 1910.
CDM 975.52.11

Often, play time was practice for grown up duties. First Nations boys would have gone fishing with elders to learn fishing skills and First Nations girls had small baskets for their berry picking.

All children would have relished their free time, using their imaginations to make the most of their limited toys and special occasions spent with family and friends.

Baby! It's Cold Outside

"...all weather prediction is futile here, and no one but a fool or a newcomer will venture it." -- Eric Duncan (1858-1944). Historian, poet, author and meteorological observer.

The Comox Valley is blessed with a moderate climate and mild winters. But we've had our weather extremes, too.

The winter of 1889-90 saw an exceptionally heavy snowfall. In his book *Shetland to Vancouver Island*, Eric Duncan recalled that the snow "... began early in December with six inches [15.2 cm] of soft stuff which froze on the roofs, forming a good foundation. This was followed daily and almost nightly through the month by a monotonous descent of heavy soft flakes, slanting from the south, till it reached a depth of five feet on the level, and most of the fences had disappeared. People were so busy shoveling roofs that they had no time to break roads, and it was with the utmost difficulty that a single sleigh track was kept open between the Valley and the wharf..."

Wildlife suffered greatly with thousands of deer trapped along beaches unable to plough through the snow to get inland. First Nations people salvaged their hides which were then shipped to a Victoria tannery.



Lorne Hotel in Comox, c. 1910.
CDM 988.207.2



5th Street, Courtenay after big snow, 1935.
Stubbs collection at CDM

The winter of 1934-35 also went down in history. What had been our usual fine weather broke on Christmas when it snowed all day for an accumulation of 20 inches (50.8 cm). It was estimated that sixty cars were off the road between Union Bay and Parksville. By Boxing Day, our only communication with the outside world was by telegraph. January brought no relief with a blizzard starting on the 20th. In fact, that January of 1935 was one of the wettest in our history with 9.52 inches (24.2 cm) of rain and 57 inches (144.8 cm) of snow.



5th Street, Courtenay after big snow, 1935.
Stubbs collection at CDM

Cream of the Crop



John Crockett Grantham, early 1940s.
Stubbs collection at CDM

The first Jersey dairy cattle came to the Comox Valley in the early 1880s. These cows were able to produce milk with a butterfat content of 5-6 % -- ideal for manufacturing butter.

Alex Urquhart began large-scale dairy farming in the Valley. By 1885, he had a herd of 45 Jersey cows.

On March 12, 1901 a group of farmers decided to build a Co-operative Creamery Association. A total of \$4040 was raised for the venture. Soon, the co-op farmers owned 255 cows.

William Carroll was appointed butter maker in 1902. He had an icehouse built to keep the milk cool in the summer and insisted on an unlimited amount of clean water. Merchants began stocking Comox Creamery butter instead of that from private farms, until finally even the largest private farmers joined the Association. By 1920 the Creamery had 2700 milking cows.



Butter maker's home and Comox Co-operative Creamery building, c.1905.
Early Comox Valley Pictorial p. 195.



Making a good thing BETTER

COMOX CREAMERY BUTTER
MADE BY THE COMOX CREAMERY ASSOCIATION

All Farmers
also are interested in the creation of an immediate market for farm and garden produce by the proposed organization of a regular ferry service between James and Powell River are urged to attend a
Mass Meeting
to be held in the assembly room (downstairs) of the
Native Sons' Hall
at 8 o'clock on
Thursday, March 27
W. W. Thomas, Marketing Commissioner, will be in attendance.
The meeting will be held under the auspices of the Courtenay-Comox Board of Trade, Farmers' Institute and County Government Co-operative Association.



Comox Creamery, Courtenay, 1927.
CDM 986.73.3

A pasteurizer was installed during WW II so milk could be supplied to the three local military installations. In 1956 the government passed a law requiring pasteurization of all milk and many local private dairies stopped home deliveries. The Creamery took up the deliveries and established routes throughout Vancouver Island.

In 1968 the Comox Creamery joined Fraser Valley Milk Producers Co-operative Association which is now owned by Dairyland of Saputo Inc.



Rene Harding (nee Howes) churning butter at Sayward, 1922.
CDM P225-244

Hook, Line and Sinker

Fishing was, and continues to be, an important part of the First People's lifestyle. Salmon, herring and eulachon are particularly significant.

When settlers arrived, First Nations fishers sold some of their catch to the newcomers -- essentially beginning the commercial fishing industry for the district. Chinook and Coho were the two kinds of salmon most consistently available. Comox developed a reputation for large-sized salmon and sport fishing in the area was very popular from the 1900s to the 1920s.



Eustace and Letitia Smith with 46 lb. salmon Letitia caught at Comox, 1934.
CDM 989.51.3

Fishing in the area was not just recreational. Canneries were built along the coast and local fishers had the opportunity to sell their catch to commercial packers. The nearest canneries were in Deep Bay and Quathiaski Cove.

Trout fishing was also popular with recreational anglers. In 1929 the lakes of the Forbidden Plateau were stocked with these fish and now the Plateau lakes produce some of the area's largest trout.

In 1932 the Comox Tyee Fishing Club was established in order to set standards to help encourage and protect fishing in the district. Fishers did well up until the 1960s, when the Chinook salmon run began to decline severely due to development on the Hydro-Electric dam on the Puntledge River. The August-September run was reduced to 10% of what it was before 1955. In 1980 the Puntledge River Fish Hatchery opened in order to try and deal with the problem.



Lucius Cliffe, 1905.
CDM 980.41.4



George Henry Mitchell (1918? - 1966).
CDM 991.140.5

Many Hands Make Light Work

Settler women spent much of their “leisure time” on making clothes, linens, rugs and knitting and crocheting. Women’s skills and creative energy turned everyday practical items into things of beauty.

Fortunately, these tasks provided opportunities for women, who might otherwise have been isolated, to connect with their friends and neighbours. Clubs developed which enabled women to practice their skills. They also provided opportunities for social connection and fun. For example, groups of women met to have quilting “bees” which turned the somewhat tedious task of stitching quilt layers into an opportunity to socialize and exchange information.

The Courtenay and District Women’s Institute was organized in 1911. The group raised money for the affiliated Agriculture Association and the Comox Creamery. During WW I, they came together to knit and sew for the men fighting overseas. Re-incorporated in 1929, members became known for their skills with handicrafts of all kinds, homemaking and their interest in furthering education. They were instrumental in the opening of Glacier View Home in 1956.

The Denman and District Lace Club began in 1919 with the arrival of Elsie Spencer from Yorkshire. She taught the art of making pillow lace to local ladies, with the help of Elsie Meadows.

Clubs like these as well as ladies aides, church groups and sister organizations helped lay the ground work for the many and varied craft groups which have existed over the years.



Comox Valley women display their handiwork, 1917.
Stubbs collection at CDM



St. John’s Anglican Church pageant, Courtenay, c. 1950s. Image includes Marjorie A. McPhee (seated in dark dress at photo centre), Rachel Corfield and Nellie Banks (to the left and right of the gramophone horn, respectively).
Stubbs collection at CDM



Mrs. Elma Pearse (third from right, knitting) and friends, 1925.
CDM 997.563.8



Comox District Women’s Institute members and friends making jam for the Red Cross, 1941.
Image includes: Mrs. Margaret (Walter) McPhee, G.Wm. (Bill) Stubbs, and Mayor Charles Simms.
Stubbs collection at CDM

While traditionally a woman’s realm, Comox Valley history does record the craft accomplishments of some men. In *Wild Roses and Rail Fences*, Leila Carroll writes of William and Mary Duncan (married in 1889) of Sandwick: “In their latter years they could be found sitting in front of their fireplace knitting. Willie did the plain knitting while Mary did the purl; Willie knit the leg, while Mary turned the heel...”.

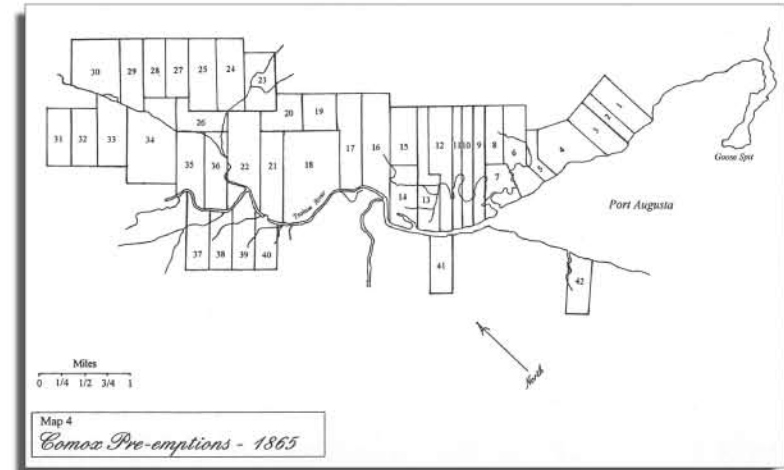
Making Their Mark

In 1857, the H.M.S. "Plumper", a Royal Navy ship commanded by Captain George Richards, arrived on the west coast of British Columbia to begin a surveying expedition.

Lieutenant Richard Mayne, who served on the "Plumper" along with Captain Richards, mapped the area. Soon after this survey expedition, Mayne released his report on the Comox Valley and the first settlers began to select their properties.

This growth of colonial settlement and commerce required the laying out of roads and property lines -- a task for land surveyors. One of the Comox Valley's most significant surveyors was George F. Drabble who arrived here in 1864 and remained until his death in 1901.

Historian Dr. Richard Mackie notes in his book *The Wilderness Profound* that Drabble first came to British Columbia in 1862 -- the same year that the Native population was devastated by a smallpox epidemic. "*Vancouver Island's land laws made it illegal to claim land that was actually inhabited by Indians, but... the depopulation made hundreds of miles of coastline available for colonial settlement.*"



Comox Pre-emptions, 1865.
From *The Wilderness Profound*, p. 55



George Fawcett Drabble (1833-1901), c. 1895.
CDM 991.84.1

"Early settlers generally chose land fronting on the ocean or a creek or river. For coastal surveys, Drabble and a chainman typically started at the front of the property and walked westward into the woods carrying a sturdy compass attached to a Jacob's staff [a rod, pointed and iron-shod at the bottom, for penetrating the ground, with a socket joint at the top for the compass]. They measured their way around trees without cutting them down. Then they turned north and walked for the same distance, turned east for the same distance until they returned to what Drabble called the "sea beach," when they turned south and followed the beach to the "point of commencement," having legally delineated a giant 160-acre square in the wilderness, forty by forty chains square." -- *The Wilderness Profound*



Theed Pearse staking a mining claim, 1917.
CDM 985.89.6

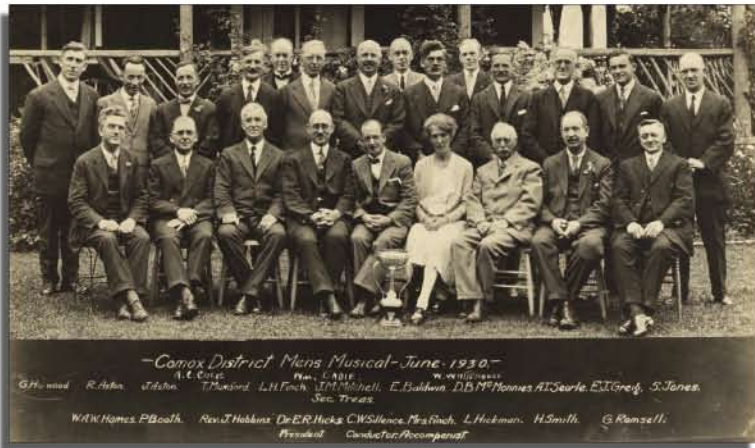
Let the Good Times Roll



Social gathering of the early 1900s.
Stubbs collection at CDM

Much pleasure was derived through music and performance. Whether it was raising voices in songs of worship to accompany church organs or the re-telling of a humorous story, settlers in the Comox Valley could always find a reason to have some fun.

Records from the local chapter of the Bateman Lodge (a temperance organization) show that many meetings ended with performances “for the good of the order”. The March 28th, 1891 meeting concluded with Brother William Parkin giving a reading, Sister Parkin instrumental music, Brother George Grieve “a favorable piece on the violin”, and Brother J.B. Bennett rounded out the evening with a “comic reading, scientific and otherwise.”



Comox District Mens Musical Choir, June 1930.
CDM 984.13.1

Up to the early 1900s, the Royal Navy trained at the Comox Spit and local historian Norman Pritchard recorded “There was friendliness between the pioneers and the naval personnel based on mutual respect. The behavior of the men [sailors] was good, and their concerts given in the old Knights of Pythias hall were bright spots in the pattern of pioneer life. The walls were gay with flags, the comedy was clean, the sailors’ hornpipes shook the old building, and the songs were either robust or dripping with sentiment.”



Production of “The Mikado”, 1905.
Image includes three of the McDonald girls (Maud, Jessie and Bessie), Myra Cliffe, Nellie Holmes, Mabel Knight, Mamie McArdle and Millie Pritchard.
CDM 979.3.117

From these early beginnings, the Comox Valley has developed into a flourishing arts and cultural community with theatre, music, dance and countless forms of artistic expression.