

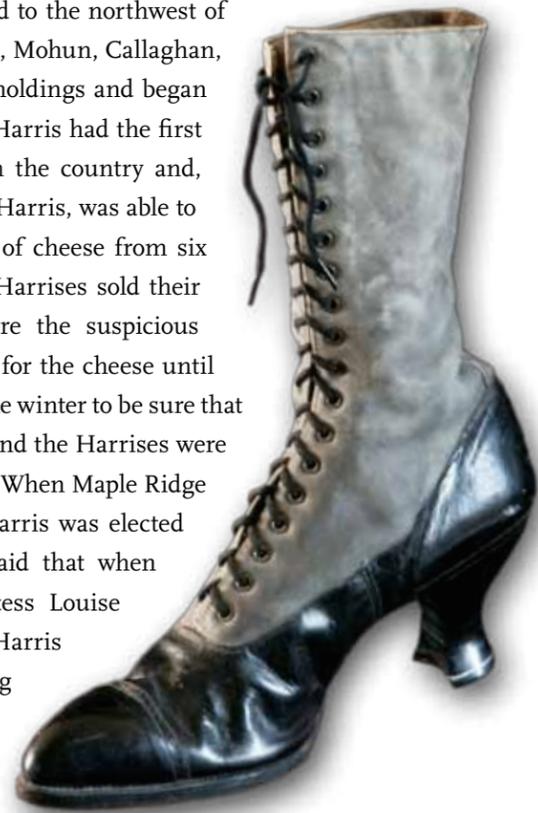
# Mrs. Park's History of Pitt Meadows

BACK IN ONTARIO, in the early 1870s, Wellington Jeffries Harris used to listen to the yarns of the west as told to him by neighbour Simon Fraser. The old explorer told young Harris that the CPR would be pushing through to the west coast inside of ten years and that he would do well to leave immediately and take up a homestead. As a result Harris left Ingersoll, Ontario, with his wife Mary Jane, mother-in-law Mrs. Matthews, and two infant boys.



Mr. & Mrs. William J. Park.

They travelled west through the US on the Union Pacific Railway to San Francisco and from there north by boat to Victoria, where Mrs. Matthews remained with the children while Wellington and Mary Jane went on to New Westminster. Here they obtained a dugout, which they used to travel up the Fraser, camping along the river when darkness overtook them. They purchased land to the northwest of the Hammond, Mohun, Callaghan, and Morrison holdings and began dairy farming. Harris had the first cheese factory in the country and, according to Mrs. Harris, was able to produce one pound of cheese from six pounds of milk. The Harrises sold their cheese in Victoria, where the suspicious merchants refused to pay for the cheese until they had kept it through the winter to be sure that it wouldn't spoil. It kept, and the Harrises were paid the following spring. When Maple Ridge formed a municipality, Harris was elected as its first reeve. It is said that when Lord Dufferin and Princess Louise visited the province, Mrs. Harris succeeded in convincing Lord Dufferin to have the CPR tracks pass right through the middle of their property.



Shoes that sold in the 1908 Sears Catalog for \$1.48 a pair.

From Mrs. William J. Park's "An early history of Pitt Meadows," written around 1960.

From the early days of Fort Langley the boats were plying up and down the Fraser River stopping at Bonson's Landing to load cordwood and produce. Some of our first pioneers came to Pitt Meadows by river transport before the CPR passed through the district in 1886. Others came by barge from Fort Langley and travelled up the Katzie Slough to higher ground to escape the annual Fraser River flood. Such families like Wellington Harris, who came in 1874. Mr. Harris later became a Member of the Legislature for the area. Following the construction of the CPR more settlers moved in to log the virgin timber and farm the lush grass. There were no schools or churches then and the children walked 3 miles usually on the train tracks to Port Hammond. Church services were held in private homes.

These early settlers battled the annual flooding of the rivers that surround our area and had to ask for help from the Municipality of Maple Ridge of which they were part and the BC government. Help was very slow in coming and this led to the separation of Pitt Meadows from Maple Ridge in 1914. Dikes were built and dredging and pumping systems put in place. In the early years the Seventh Day Adventist church established a school on what is now called Advent Road. Many of the church followers moved into the area. The Adventists built our present community church.

Dairy farming and fruit growing became popular because of the markets close by. The CPR stopped at the Pitt Meadows station and loaded produce and milk for New Westminster and Vancouver. Families travelled by horse and buggy and to cross the Pitt River you went by ferry. This was only done on market days.

Early settlers were the Parks and McMyns in 1905, followed by Blaneys, Cooks, Sharpes and Struthers.

A post office, school and stores were opened and roads constructed including the corduroy road over the bog. Around 1925 there started an influx of Japanese who farmed fruit and vegetables until 1941. The federal government forced them to move east and to the interior.

Pitt Meadows is still a farming area. Part of the peat bog has become a thriving blueberry farm. The flood plain of Pitt Lake has been converted to the productive Pitt Polder with its dairy cattle, potatoes, and nursery stock.

We have now progressed from a ferry crossing over the Pitt River to highways with automobiles over the Pitt River Bridge. And now with the airport to be built, we will probably be able to fly into Pitt Meadows.

What a long way Pitt Meadows has come since 1874.

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