

Driving on a plank road along the Ford Road Detour, circa 1925.

Pioneering in Pitt Meadows

by Lloyd Baynes, from a document now in the possession of the Pitt Meadows Museum.

The community of Pitt Meadows had its heart at the point where the Harris Road crossed the CPR tracks. North of the tracks were families named McTavish, Blaney, Sharpe, Harris, Park, and two McMyn brothers, William and John. W. J. Park was a prime mover in organizing the Fraser Valley Milk Producers' Association and reeve of the young municipality for several years. Frank Harris served a long term of years as secretary of the school board, and his mother ran the Sunday school.

Sternwheelers like the *Beaver* played a considerable part in the

community's economic life, but the main artery that linked us to beyond was the CPR. The daily "milk train" seemed to govern our lives in those days when the roads were often almost impassable.

The one and only general store was operated by a Mr. Crickmay. Later, the Thornton family took it over. The store keeper was also the CPR agent, and he represented the Dominion Express Company. He was postmaster and paperboy, and he sold subscriptions to the *Family Herald*, the *Weekly Star*, and to the *National Geographic Magazine*. He kept the store open till 8:00 P.M., and there was something like a social gathering each night around the stove in the centre of the store. One of the area's rare telephones was at the store, and in emergencies a message could be sent to the telegraph office at Hammond. There was a Dr. Sutherland in Port Coquitlam and a Dr. Morse in Haney.

Continuing south on Harris Road brings us to a corner where a small white Adventist Church marked one end of Ford Road. That road extended west for a half-mile, passing en route such landmarks as "The Big Spring," Baynes Road, and the farms of families named Sutton, Thompson, Ford, and Schultz. Baynes Road got its name from the fact that my father and one of his brothers had farms there, with access at first only by way of the dike road from Bonson's Landing. I remember that we paid our taxes one year by taking the first steps to establish a road on top of the huge "bites" of peat and clay that the drainage dredge had left behind. We used a team of horses pulling what was known as a scrapper. It was essentially a giant scoop with out-size wheel-barrow handles. Axes were brought in to use at times when we encountered tree stumps in our path. Eventually, however, we provided a road that was passable in good weather, and because of its peat content, it produced a surprisingly soft ride for farm wagons without springs. That road today leads to the Pitt Meadows airport.

Back now to Harris Road and Mr. Reid's house across from the little church. This house had indoor plumbing, including a large "tin" bath-tub, and a brick fireplace. These had come about when Mr. Reid sold his farm to the CPR for its gravel content. They excavated to a depth of forty feet or so, and used the gravel to stabilize the western portion of their new marshalling yards at Port Coquitlam. Mr. Reid's prosperity qualified him for the position of reeve, and quite a few people asked his advice on all sorts of topics.

Looking southwest, we soon passed several acres of land where strawberries and raspberries were grown by the pioneer Cook family. Another hundred yards brought us to

Reeves & Mayors of Pitt Meadows

1914	John Blaney
1915–1923	William Reid
1924	W. D. Bruce
1925	Paul Murray
1926–1929	John Blaney
1930–1931	W. D. Bruce
1932–1933	Sherman Herbert Ford
1934–1947	William J. Park
1948–1965	Harold A. Sutton
1966–1975	Oscar Austring
1976–1987	Daniel Sharpe
1988–1993	C. J. Tiedman
1994–1999	David Duncan

2000-2008 Donald McLean

Pitt Meadows Elementary School Number One. This was an ungraded school with about twenty-five pupils, a different teacher every year, and pit-toilets in a corner of the school-yard. For several months, I was that school's janitor. I swept out most of the dirt, chopped fire-wood, and kept the water-bucket filled. It sat by the big stove in the class-room, and we all drank from the same dipper. My chores at the school brought me three dollars a month, and the feeling that I was getting somewhere financially. On Sundays the school became a church. Four denominations held their services there. One Sunday it would be Anglican with Reverend Govier in the afternoon and Methodist with Reverend Pye in the evening. The following Sunday there would be a Presbyterian minister Reverend Findlay in the afternoon and a Baptist service by Reverend Auvache in the evening.

The ministers used bikes in good weather, buggies otherwise. There would be twenty or twenty-five people in attendance. Many went to all the services irrespective of denomination. I was delegated somehow to pass the collection plate at many of these assorted services. And there was considerable entertainment in watching men of six-feet-four and their buxom spouses fit themselves into primary-grade seats. And we were fascinated watching the well-intentioned lady who played the organ. That instrument seemed related to the Scottish bag-pipes, and the players had to maintain air-pressure by valiant and violent pumping of the feet. The "lungs" of the thing seemed to be leaking and only weak notes could be obtained.

At the school corner, Harris Road became only a footpath to the Fraser River. Hammond Road proceeded eastward. There was a little road of only a few hundred yards running west from the school corner. On it were the homes of the two Baynes families and that of Mr. and Mrs. Swartz. Mrs. Swartz had a special status, being the supplier of fresh farm produce to the Hotel Vancouver. These items—eggs, chickens, ducklings, honey, berries, and in autumn wild mushrooms—went daily to the station via wheel-barrow pushed by her husband.

At school we had children from families named Sharpe, McMyn, Sherdahl, Aylwin, Homfeld, Hutchison, Spence, Sutton, Johnson, Reid, Howlett, and Baynes. No doubt there were a few others whose names escape me now.

Farm children, by the age of ten, could identify timothy, blue-joint, and red-top. They knew red and alsike clover. They could recognize rutabagas and mangolds, oats, barley, wheat, and rye. They spoke of neck-yokes and hames, cruppers

and breeching, scythes and flails, shakes and froes. They knew double-trees and disc-harrows, democrats and buckboards. Also binders, balers, and threshing machines, cream separators and barrel churns. Certainly rural life provided more learning experiences for younger children. They also knew that life got to be a lot easier when electricity reached the area. Meanwhile, it was a matter of milking cows by hand using coal-oil lamps and dreaming of electrical gadgets. And those sad-irons were sad indeed.

There was no development on Hammond Road for a half-mile east of the school. Then Bonson Road ran south to the Callaghans' Farm, the Fraser, the Dike Road, and Katzie Indian Reservation. Native fishermen like Joe Florence and Pierre St. Pierre would net 300 fish per night when a run was at its peak. It was possible to buy spring salmon of thirty to forty pounds for two dollars. One year supply so far outstripped demand that it was "any fish in the boat" for thirty-five cents.

Hammond Road, east of Bonson, crossed the CPR gravel pit, and after reaching Brook's Crossing, we changed jurisdictions. It was no longer Pitt Meadows but instead Maple Ridge territory to go to high school.

I recall one hot summer when a lot of Pitt Meadows residents went short of sleep for several weeks. Huge fires on the Langley side of the river filled the sky with blazing material and the wind delivered red-glowing embers as large as a person's finger into bush land on our side of the river. These invading spot-fires had to be contained quickly, usually by cutting the underbrush, and using shovels to make a firebreak.

And I recollect one winter period so cold and so long-lasting that the Fraser River was frozen to the point that permitted Mr. Campbell of Barnston Island to move all his livestock and farm machinery and other belongings across the ice to a new farm on our side of the river. That cold spell took the lives of hundreds of ducks that became frozen into a sort of backwater near the Katzie Indian Reserve.





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