

Mclver settles in Maple Ridge

An interview with John Mclver appeared in the Coquitlam Star on 8 May 1912:

Mr. Mclver as the oldest and one of the most respected of early pioneers has kindly given many points in respect of those days. He would have been a remarkable man in any society. He tells not only of the wanderings, and land and water life that made the HBC men almost amphibious, but of sleeping out in the open for months at a time, and of going sleeveless at times because the sleeves of his coat had rotted off with the rain. In the long hours of solitary life, he devoured many works of great masters of literature. His mind was full of the thoughts of Milton; the makers of history were profound to this lonely student. He saw much likeness in the visions of the Indians and the prophetic books of the Bible. In appearance Mr. Mclver is nearing on six feet, with a great breadth of chest, a fine upstanding man that holds his head well. His resounding R's and Gaelic vowels carry one back to North Britain. Though now a white haired old man, wearing his hair long in the old style, there are still fires in his hazel eyes, and stirring tones in his voice, while his undying love for Scotland brings a mist to one's eyes. His wife would have put some of their property on the market ere now, but Mr. Mclver cannot see it go for any money. He is a man of great tenacity and has had huge strength. Asked if in the old days they were not worn out with fatigue, he replied they never thought of it, they were just trained to endure and to meet literally all kinds of hardships. Hardy, kind, devoted to his home, full of lusty strength, and in some ways with the simplicity of a child, keen as a hunter, tactful with the Indians, philosophical in misfortune—this typifies the old timer who is passing away from us with the advent of railways and commercial exploitation of the land. One may be pardoned a detailed description, for this type of pioneer is dear to our hearts.

From drinking tea quietly with the family in their parlour one is carried back to the long ago on the

stream of his eloquence that paints the early life again plainly before us.

Settlers at first lived on the south side of the river. The first detachment of the Royal Engineers came to Derby, which it was hoped to build into a big place, and an English syndicate was formed with great expectations. Shortly after Colonel (Richard Clement) Moody made his first survey of the whole district. It was, however, found that what suited as a centre among the Indians for collecting skins did not recommend itself to the commanding officer in those days as the site of a new city. It was therefore superseded by New Westminster. The new church, which had been given to Derby by the Baroness (Angela) Burdett Coutts, was removed about 1880 to Maple Ridge, where it now stands. It was constructed of giant redwood cedar, specially brought for the purpose from California.

The little handful of white men at Fort Langley, including Mclver, were among some of those who were the original finders of gold in the Fraser River. Mclver moved to Hammond about 1859-60, where was situated the only landing spot of those days. He lived there for a time, going back and forth to the Cariboo. The officer at the Fort was then Mr. Newton. When the Hudson's Bay Company's charter expired and the Colonial Office took over the territory, Governor James Douglas, the late senior chief factor of the Company, took the oath of allegiance as Governor of British Columbia at Fort Langley, on November 19th, 1858. "So help me God, it ended, as Mr. Mclver, who was present, well remembered. Among other good men and true who witnessed the swearing-in were Jim Taylor, Cromarty, Bonson and other engineers. Was the Governor true to that oath? A friend asked the old pioneer. "Ay, was he? Do ye no ken (you not know) James Douglas? That was a man. That was a great man."

The old maps, Mclver relates, were made by HBC's officers from information supplied by the Indians. They would come into the camp weary from a long trail. After a meal they would be asked how they got there. Then would follow explanations. "It was this way along the river, over a hill, over rapids" (marking on the palm of the hand); three days through the forest (counting on the fingers);

and so on. The information supplied was always approximately correct. They had made the trail and had firm hold of it in their mind's eye, for losing it was a matter of life or death. The good terms on which the HBC lived with the Indians, terms that compare favourably with the French and Spanish intercourse of the American continent, thus made them masters of the general geography of their territory, and this knowledge was the basis of all the first maps. Mr. Mclver was on the same friendly footing. His children were Mclver papoose and his wife Kloochooman Mclver. Many tales, visions and wise sayings did they confide to him in Chinook."

"Perhaps when he was getting a little tired of the mines, Mclver made a trade with a Kanaka Indian living on the north bank for 160 acres of land paying him \$40. This was about 1862, and he owns that land today. Three white men settled near him, named (William) Nelson, (James) Wickwire and (William Justus) W.J. Howison, the last the father of the Justice. The whole place was dense forest, trees grown to an immense height. Going up from the river to Mclver's home, he could only see the sky here and there. For entertainment, on a bright night he would go out about 200 yards from the house to where a break in the woods gave a view of the heavens. Maple Ridge was not popular in those days. It went by the name of British Siberia. John Foster, in order to get away, sold out for five bottles of rum to (John) McKenney and (James) Lindsay. Then Brook's place below Hammond was pre-empted by John MacIntosh. (James) Blenkinsopp and Mr. (William Henry) Newton held 160 acres each between that holding and the river. To get rid of it, the owner sold it to them for two bottles of rum and one bottle of brandy. Twenty acres of this same land is now valued at \$20,000. Mclver was a witness of this transaction, the recording of which cost \$2.

William Hammond and John Anderson came in later. Hammond bought his land off an Orkney boy, a sailor named "Billie" who had likewise purchased it off "Billie" (The Kanaka) paying a sack of flour and two blankets. The Indian struck his tent pegs, roamed to Kattie Slough and thence to the mouth of Pitt Lake. For fixing up and recording this transaction, Judge Crease, who was



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The Mclver family sold their Maple Ridge farms in the mid-1920s to the Municipality of Maple Ridge to be used in perpetuity as the Maple Ridge golf course.

a countryman of Hammond's, mulcted (stuffed) him the sum of \$70, over which item he was rather sore. It was not any credit to own land or appreciate salmon then. Mclver, who had his work as a cooper near the landing at Hammond, used to trade direct with the fishermen as they brought in their haul. He recollected their jibe, "Ya ya, Look at him. There goes a rancher and a salmon eater!"

In this ways it came about that the settlers spread over to the north bank of the river. The English Church, as related, was transported from Derby. Two years ago it celebrated the jubilee of the first service. Mclver, and the late John Hammond being the only survivors present who had witnessed the first dedication. Mrs. Howison's house at Maple Ridge, which was also the store and post office, then stood in the forest. The orchard planted there is the first in BC. Furthermore, the Town Hall and centre of things was in Maple Ridge until the CPR came through in 1885, when stations being opened up at Hammond and Haney, Maple Ridge shunned publicity for a short spell.

Early Days

By Mary McFarlane

My father, the late John Mclver, owned the first piece of land on this side of the Fraser River. In the year 1853 he and several other young men from Lewis Island, Scotland, came to Canada in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. They landed at Fort Churchill on the Hudson's Bay, went to Fort Carleton, then overland on snowshoes stopping at the different forts en route until arriving at Fort Langley, where my father was stationed for eight years until the company disbanded.

The men in the service had the choice of having their fares paid back to the Old Country or settling on a quarter section of land, most of them chose the latter, among them my father. The piece of land on which he settled is now divided among the eight members of our family—most of them are still residing here, including myself. He began to clear the heavy timber with the motto that "Man conquers as he achieves and achieves as he aspires."

She continued: "When settlement first began on the north bank of the Fraser River, roads were not a burning issue, for the early settlers located on the banks of the river and that was their highway. Later when incoming settlers were obliged to locate some distance from the river, the need for roads became apparent.

The following is a story of the first highway in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows by the late Sergeant John McKenney of the Royal Engineers at an entertainment in the Maple Ridge schoolhouse, where it was well received and judged the best number of the program.

When the residents who were located some distance from the Fraser River felt that they should have some better way of reaching the different landings on the river other than ordinary trails, they petitioned the government at Victoria, praying for a grant for road construction.

The powers that were at that time granted their prayer, and placed at their disposal \$1000 for the purpose sought, and appointed the late W. J.

Howison, one of the original settlers, foreman of construction, giving him instructions to purchase the necessary tools without delay.

This he did, purchasing tools in the amount of \$100 leaving \$900 for road construction. He then engaged nearly all of the residents as his road gang and instructed them to meet him at a certain point, on the day he appointed, and road construction would begin. On the day appointed all who had been engaged appeared. Mr. Howison led them to a small island on the prairie near the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows boundary line and south of the CPR main line.

And here without pomp or ceremony the first tree was cut on the first highway in the two districts; a road referred to locally as the Old Howison Road or Trail. When a small space had been cleared, Mr. Howison produced a compass with which he proposed to establish the direction of the road. As soon as he had laid it upon a log, a dog belonging to one of the party leaped upon it, smashing the compass. Thereafter the construction of the highway proceeded without the use of the instrument, and this may account for its winding nature.

From the starting point, the road was made to Pitt River, through the standing timber, all small to medium trees were closely chopped and all logs removed to a width of about twelve-feet, large trees were avoided. Very little grading was done. From the west side of the high land in Pitt Meadows to Pitt River it was only a foot path or trail, split cedar planks being laid lengthwise over the waterways.

When the western end was completed, the party returned to the starting point and construction began eastward through Maple Ridge, lacking the guidance of a compass, the course was what might be termed crooked, but mainly parallel to the Fraser River, not leading from the river to residents in the back district.

When the construction had reached a point somewhere in the vicinity of Kanaka Creek, those who laboured on the road being residents, began to say to one another "what particular good does this road do us?" and from that followed the natural, though delayed enquiry of the foreman