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YOUNG RANGER BANDS

by Jack Long

Perhaps there is no better way to introduce the Young Rangers than to quote from the Forest Branch Newsletter of October 18, 1937:

"In the beginning...a fire broke out near Palling, endangering valuable timber. Several lads from the neighbouring homesteads picked up axe and shovel, made their way in all haste to the spot and had the fire well under control when the Forest Ranger arrived. Mr. W.C. Saunders was inspired by their action to form the boys and girls of that district into a 'Young Ranger Band.' Their motto became: 'These are our forests to defend against the fires of thoughtless men.' A ritual was drawn up and the organization made a secret one somewhat on the lines of a 'Lodge.' This appealed to the youngsters who jealously guard their secrets revealing them only to those who are initiated. It was a splendid idea. To educate young people to be forest conscious is in line with our school talks and is the solution of the forest fire problem. Everything possible has been done by the Forest Branch to further this movement. There has not been any merchantable timber burned in the Burns Lake Ranger District in seven years, since the Young Ranger Bands became established. Young Ranger Bands have been formed from Smithers to McBride."

Walter Wilson, Ranger, Burns Lake

The rapid expansion of this movement, and its contribution to fire protection needs further explanation.

The influx of settlers into the district after the First World War brought many people from the prairies and Europe. Many had little concern for the forest and little knowledge of the devastation caused by forest fires. Their chief concern was to get rid of trees and get on with farming. Each spring the practice of burning off last year's dried grass and other herbaceous plants to improve grazing for stock resulted in many fires escaping into merchantable timber. During the 1920s the Forest Branch was plagued with this type of fire.

By this time, the Branch had begun to promote forest protection by giving talks in the schools, so young people were not entirely ignorant of this important aspect of forestry. But the story wasn't reaching adults. After the formation of the Ranger Bands, the story was brought home to parents; thus, whole communities became promoters of forest conservation.

Another factor to remember: although these Band members were aged 10 - 16 years, they could scarcely be called children. By that age they were quite used to hard work and quite proficient in the use of such tools as axes, saws, shovels and grubhoes. The older ones particularly gave a better account of themselves on the fireline than many adults recruited from the towns.

In rural areas, most were farmers, so saddlehorses were usually available to the young people; they became good riders at an early age. The horses provided them with fairly fast transportation within the community. Access to fires was always a problem. With horses available, firefighters, tools and equipment could reach a fire in a very short time, and probably it could be contained before it got out of control. On a number of occasions Young Rangers accomplished the task.

The social aspects of this movement were also important. In fact, the value of this social function possibly exceeded that of forest conservation. In these rural, and sometimes isolated communities, the Young Ranger Bands became the first organization to promote the welfare of young people. There were, after all, no organizations such as the Boy Scouts or Girl Guides or even church-sponsored groups available in such communities.

The Ranger Bands were a benefit to the whole community – they took the lead in promoting many activities and provided stimulus to bring the community together. Band members soon became quite self-reliant, capable of conducting a meeting and speaking in public; for the most part, they conducted their own affairs. Forest Branch personnel helped in many ways, often providing transportation to summer camps and district meetings.

Many Forest Branch employees were initiated into the Band as Honorary members. Among these was Chief Forester E.C. Manning. In the July 30, 1936 newsletter, Mr. Manning reported on a trip made through the Prince George and Prince Rupert forest districts:

“Probably the chief matter of interest in my trip was my contact with the Young Ranger Bands of Burns Lake and Palling.... I had the honour of being initiated as an Honorary Member of the Palling Band on July 4th and must admit I was impressed with the ceremony and the serious way it was carried out. They put me through the whole works and [I] am inclined to think added something extra for trimmings. Probably twenty-five or thirty Young Rangers were present, together with nearly an equal number of adults.”

Some of the Forest Branch personnel whom I can remember as being interested in and helping to promote the Ranger Bands were: District Forester Parlow, Prince Rupert; District Forester Gregg, Prince George; the Hon. A. Wells Gray, Department of Lands; and C.D. Orchard, Arthur Waddington, Ernie Matheson, Ted Martin, Ike Martin, Alex Chisholm and various other personnel attached to Ranger Stations throughout the districts. Most of these became Honorary Members. I would say, however, that had it not been for the support of Walter and Mrs. Wilson, the Ranger Bands would never have gained the prominence they did.

At his initiation, the Hon. A. Wells Gray said he hoped the Young Rangers would have the privilege of initiating the Governor-General of Canada during his visit to Tweedsmuir Provincial Park in the summer of 1938. Since Burns Lake was to be the starting point of this trek, weeks of preparation were necessary for his visit. But it was the initiation of Lord Tweedsmuir as Grand Honorary Chief Ranger that stole the show! It became the most important event in the history of the Young Ranger Bands.

There is a small one-acre island in Burns Lake, a mile or so east of town. It was cleared and a log building constructed to be used as a Lodge Hall. In 1936, at the suggestion of Canon Hinchcliffe, then Minister of Lands, this island was made a provincial park and became the property of the Young Ranger Bands for as long as they existed as an active organization. It was used for some time for meetings and picnics, but proved unsuited for any camp purpose since it lacked a good beach for swimming. A permanent campsite, however, was established on the shores of Pinkut Lake. Both boys' and girls' camps were held each summer. Sports, the important part of camp life, and good sportsmanship were emphasized.

Sadly crippled for leadership during World War II, this wonderful organization unfortunately met its demise. The original members who, as Honorary Members, continued their support, were now of military age and so were lost to the services.

A number of other factors also contributed to the demise. Most people had acquired automobiles, removing much of the isolation of these communities. Later, when consolidation of school districts occurred and the little log school houses were closed, these rural areas lost much of their identities, becoming just small parts of larger communities. Further, the forest industry changed from small operators to large companies. In the process, a way of life was destroyed and dreams were shattered. The old broad axe rusted in the woodshed and weeds grew up around the little portable sawmill in the backyard.



Realizing that the majority of British Columbians have never heard of the Young Ranger Bands, I have written their story (by no means in its entirety) because I feel it should be told. The movement served its time well, but times changed, and it ceased to be. Their story too deserves a place among the annals of the British Columbia Forest Service.

Jack Long



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING TO BE HELD JUNE 17

As announced in the previous newsletter, our annual general meeting for 1995 will be held at the Sooke Region Museum on Saturday, June 17. The program is as follows:

11:00 AM - Noon

Business meeting

Noon - 1:00 PM

A sit-down catered lunch consisting of barbecued salmon and refreshments, for which there will be a token charge of \$3.00 per person.

Most of the costs are being underwritten through the generous donations of a few sponsors.

An FHABC Award of Merit will be presented and Jack Fleetwood's book of logging poetry "On the F Line" (described and excerpted in newsletter number 38) will receive its official launch.

1:00 - 4:00/5:00 PM

The Sooke Region Museum will host us for the rest of the afternoon.

A presentation will be made on aspects of the local history and hopefully it will be possible to fire up an old piece of machinery.

The afternoon will conclude with a short walk through the grounds and to the nearby Sooke Band Reserve to view the largest dugout western redcedar canoe on the B.C. coast (15 m in length).

Please confirm your attendance by phoning

Bob DeBoo (office 387-1061, home 478-7446) or

John Parminter (office 356-6810, home 595-0374)

by June 15 and indicate how many will be in your party.

The Sooke Region Museum is located at 2070 Phillips Road (642-6351), almost immediately after you cross the Sooke River bridge on the main highway into Sooke from Victoria. It is in the eastern outskirts of Sooke - if you get as far as downtown Sooke you've gone too far.



EX-FOREST SERVICE VESSEL SQUADRON RENDEZVOUS IN VANCOUVER

On the Canada Day long weekend the annual rendezvous of the ex-Forest Service Vessel Squadron will be held in Vancouver, at the Maritime Museum (1905 Ogden Avenue in Kitsilano, phone 257-8300). This year's meet will be a very special version of the rendezvous as many of the people who built, maintained and/or served on the boats will be in attendance to celebrate their work and to revisit the boats which were such important parts of their lives in years past.

This year's rendezvous is being sponsored jointly by the Forest History Association of B.C., the Ex-Forest Service Vessel Squadron, the Vancouver Maritime Museum and the B.C. Ministry of Forests. The official opening will take place at 10:00 AM on Saturday, July 1 - we hope to get the Hon. Andrew Petter, Minister of Forests to officiate. A buffet and reception will be held from 19:00 to 22:00 h that evening.

The boats will be open for viewing on the afternoons of July 1 and 2 - complete with ex-Forest Service staff to relate their experiences to visitors. There will be displays concerning the Forest Service and the work done from the boats. Authors of regional histories which include various aspects of the Forest Service fleet will be on hand as well.

We are hoping for a large turnout from our membership, retired Forest Service staff, interested members of the boating community and the general public. This event will be historical in its own right and a documentary video will be made by Simon Fraser University.

Some FHABC members who are ex-Forest Service staff will likely have received a separate notice regarding this rendezvous. If you have or have not, here are the pertinent details: a registration fee of \$10 for an individual or individual plus spouse applies. It can be paid in advance or on arrival. There will be a token charge of \$1.00 for public access to the docks. The buffet/reception on Saturday night (19:00 - 22:00) is casual dress and informal.

In order to register you for the rendezvous we require the following information:

Your name, address and phone number

The number of people in your party

AND

- 1) If your party will attend the buffet/reception on Saturday, July 1.
- 2) If you will be able to be on duty for a time on a boat to talk to the public about your experiences on the boats (applies to ex-Forest Service staff only).
- 3) If you live in the Vancouver area and could billet an out-of-towner for a day or two (that would be very helpful as commercial accommodations will be at a premium).

The contact person is Bill McLachlan at # 304 - 464 Lampson Street, Victoria, B.C. V9A 5Z3. The information is required by June 16th in order to advise the caterers of expected numbers. If you live on southern Vancouver Island or the Lower Mainland and can reply in time by mail please do so. Otherwise, phone and quickly advise Bill of the pertinent details and then send in a confirmation by mail, along with your \$10 registration fee if you wish to pay in advance.

Come and help us make this year's rendezvous a real success!

HERITAGE NEWS ITEMS

Kaatza Station Museum

The Kaatza Station Museum at Lake Cowichan has a temporary display on exhibit, entitled "Paldi, the town that Mayo built." Contact the Kaatza Historical Society at 749-6142 for further information.

Pacific Northwest Tool Collectors and B.C. Industrial Heritage Group to Meet

The Pacific Northwest Tool Collectors have been meeting for many years to exhibit, buy, sell and talk about tools and their uses. The B.C. Industrial Heritage Group concerns itself with public collections of machinery and buildings and this joint meeting is the perfect way for the two groups to explore areas of common interest. The meeting starts at 9:00 AM on Saturday, August 19, 1995 at the Britannia Heritage Shipyard (on Dyke Road near Brunswick) in Steveston, B.C.

Western Forest Products Tour

Western Forest Products Ltd. has offered the FHABC a free tour of their Jordan River Division, emphasizing the historical aspects of their operations. If enough members express an interest we can organize a tour sometime this summer (before September). If you are interested please contact Bob DeBoo and advise him.

McLean Mill National Historic Site

The R.B. McLean Lumber Company mill near Port Alberni was the location of our 1989 Annual General Meeting. Since then it was designated a National Historic Site and work has continued to restore the site and develop the themes that will be interpreted to visitors. While the original plan was to dismantle the mill and rebuild it on a different site, the donation in 1994 of 12 hectares of land by MacMillan-Bloedel Ltd. to the City of Port Alberni meant that the restoration could continue *in situ*.

Operated by the McLean family from 1926 to 1965, the mill is now owned by the City of Port Alberni. Other partners in the restoration program are Parks Canada; Employment and Immigration Canada; the B.C. Heritage Trust; B.C. Ministry of Small Business, Tourism & Culture; B.C. 21; the Regional District of Alberni-Clayoquot; the Alberni-Clayoquot Economic Development Commission; the Alberni Valley Museum; the Alberni Valley Historical Society; the Western Vancouver Island Industrial Heritage Society; the McLean family and MacMillan-Bloedel Ltd.

The mill itself is the last surviving steam-operated sawmill in B.C. and the camp complex occupies 13 hectares of land about 10 kilometres northeast of Port Alberni. There are 34 extant buildings and structures in addition to the mill - residential buildings, structures used to service equipment, a millpond, fish ladder and a railway siding. Heavy equipment, including vehicles and a steam donkey, are also part of the site.

Working from a set of objectives that include preservation of the historic site, commemoration of the forest industry, contribution to local economic diversification, environmental restoration and community involvement, a number of themes have been developed:

Main themes

Logging

- cutting, bucking, yarding and transport of logs
- tools and technology

Sawmilling

- dressed and dimension lumber

Labour & People

- working and living conditions in the mill and camp
- role of government and unions
- hazards and dangers in the workplace

Transportation & Marketing

- product shipping evolution
- national and international marketing

Related themes

Technology

- obsolete technologies
- steam, hand and gasoline equipment
- logging

Camp life

- social, living and labour conditions
- role of women in the mills and camps
- ethnic subdivisions

Agriculture

- kitchen and cookhouse gardens, potato and turnip farm
- Japanese garden

Forest

- forest industry
- natural environment, species
- properties of wood
- logging and milling
- growth, harvesting and forest regeneration

The above information was extracted from the first two issues of the McLean Mill National Historic Site's newsletter *Sawmill Heritage*. To request subsequent issues contact the General Manager, McLean Mill National Historic Site, 4586 Victoria Quay, Port Alberni, B.C. V9Y 6G3 (fax 724-6328).



COMPUTER-BASED FOREST HISTORY BIBLIOGRAPHIC SEARCHES NOW POSSIBLE

For those of you with access to the computer Internet, you can search the Forest History Society's forest history bibliography from anywhere in the world. The bibliography is housed in the Duke University library computer in Durham, North Carolina and can be accessed with "Gopher" software.

Follow this sequence to access the database:

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After entry of a keyword, the search software will check the bibliography and return up to forty citation "hits" per search with the entries weighted for relevance.

Your editor has used this software and found it to perform as advertised and yield good results. Thanks to the Forest History Society's newsletter "The Cruiser" for this information.



THE FOREST HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF B.C.

This newsletter is the official organ of the Forest History Association of British Columbia. It is distributed at no charge to members of the association, libraries, archives and museums. Items on forest history topics, descriptions of current projects, requests for information, book reviews, letters, comments and suggestions are welcomed.

Please submit newsletter material and send changes of address to the Editor: Mr. John Parminter, # 1 - 949 Pemberton Road, Victoria, B.C. V8S 3R5. Phone 595-0374.

Membership in the association is \$7.00 yearly, or \$30 for five years.

Please send dues to the Treasurer: Mr. Edo Nyland, 8793 Forest Park Drive, Sidney, B.C. V8L 4E8. Phone 656-9276.

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