

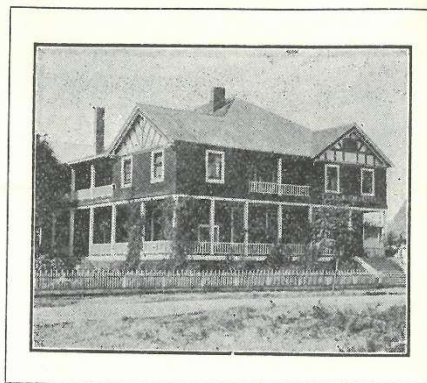
Curator's Corner

Four Letters to Mrs. M.

The Gerry Wellburn Collection is one of many that the BC Forest Discovery Centre manages. (1) Part of this collection includes four letters written by A.M. of Duncan BC to a Mrs. M. in Hazelton BC. These letters provide an interesting and fascinating glimpse of life in the Cowichan Valley in the early 1900's. (2) (3)

Using stationary from the Tzouhalem Hotel, the first letter is dated September 12, 1909 and the last is dated February 27, 1910. (4)

The first letter, with footnotes, is as follows.



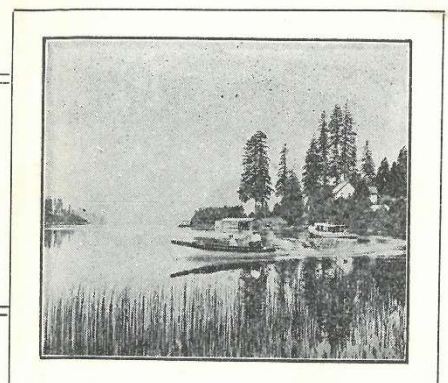
TZOUHALEM HOTEL, DUNCAN

DAILY STAGE BETWEEN THE TWO HOTELS

TZOUHALEM
HOTEL

PRICE BROS., - - - PROPRIETORS

DUNCAN
E. & N. RAILWAY, - - VANCOUVER ISLAND



LAKESIDE HOTEL, COWICHAN LAKE

Duncan, B. C. Sunday Sept. 12. 1909

Dear Mrs M

You will probably like to hear something about the Hirsch's dance. (5) They were pretty lucky in having a fine night for it, although the rain had been threatening all day, only a few drops fell which didn't do any harm. I hiked out there. There was a Chinese lantern hanging from each telephone post from the main road to the house, so that no one could get lost.

Mrs. Dirom was standing at the front door telling the people where to go to change their shoes etc., and there was a tray in the hall with numbered bits of carboard, each man having to choose one, and it depended on whether he chose an odd or an even number whether he went in to the first or second supper table.

They have a fine big room for dancing, but at times it was rather crowded as there must have been over a hundred people there.

The supper table was laid in a big tent outside, and there was plenty of everything to eat and drink – in fact enough for twice the number of people. I heard next day that the supper things had been left outside uncovered all night and when Mr. Hirsch go up next morning, he found the turkeys, ducks, and chickens all over the place polishing off the remains.

Pretty near everyone was there, but I didn't notice the Townends, the Hanhams, the Knox's, the Leathers or the Michaels. The Mortens didn't go either.

Miss Thain from Victoria played the piano, and there was a man playing the fiddle. The music was very good – lots of it new. (6)

Mr. Lane drove Mrs. Kennington up from the Bay, and about the middle of the second half he came to her and told her it was time to go. She managed to get two more dances before being dragged off, however. I got home about quarter past four.

Aunt Susie and Agnes arrived in Victoria last Thursday week and were sorry they hadn't a chance to see you before you left. Agnes has gone back to Ucluelet stopping off a boat at Cape Beale, and Aunt Susie and Uncle Willie went up to Shahtlam yesterday. (7)

Willie and Hamish got up to School all right last Tuesday. The express from Keast's arrived at the Bay about 8 o'clock and the blankets etc. were all packed ready for them. (8)

Willie took the green boat up to his Uncle's on Monday, and Mr. Macrae promised to haul the white boat up into the boathouse when they left.

The Kingstons came up from the Bay on Wednesday to look after something from the farm and get ready for the Show. (9) I think Hank said some of them would probably go down for a few days again if the weather kept fine, but I am afraid it is getting rather cold at nights now. I wonder if it is freezing yet at Hazelton. I suppose it will be at night.

Willie told me you got to Hazelton all right and that you expected to be settle down in about two days after you wrote.

An Etude came the other day which I understand is to be handed over to Mrs. Morten. (10) I also re-addressed another letter from the dead letter office to you. Let me know if they are the ones I posted.

I went down to the Mortens' to supper last Thursday and we had a game of three handed bridge afterwards. There was a fourth, but he couldn't come at the last moment.

Mr. Morten was sorting out the jars of fruit – yours included – to be sent to the Show next day. I'm afraid Mrs. Dryer got the first prize for bottled cherries. I met her the other day and she asked me to go up and see them some time. Mr. Dwyer is working at the sawmill here now.

Willie and Hammish have been spending the week at Knox's Camp. Next Friday, I think they are going to the Wallichs. They were both at the Show yesterday, and I think enjoyed it.

The fish are running at Cowichan Bay now. I hear that Maheny caught 16 this morning, and everyone seems to be catching them.

I went to Victoria yesterday afternoon and just got back by this afternoon's train.

The house hasn't be let yet, although one man is considering whether he will take it, and the Serviens are going to have a look at it tomorrow as they seem to be tired of staying so far from town.

Monday 13th

I am going down to Victoria again to meet the Tees. (11) Mr. Thompson's sisters are in it on their way back from Cape Beale. (12)

Yours Sincerely

Alex M

(I hope you find some news in this, although I don't think there's much.)

Footnotes:

(1) Gerry Wellburn, the founder of the BC Forest Discovery Centre was a legendary collector of British Columbia history. His locomotives, logging equipment, and Cowichan Valley artifacts form the basis of the Forest Discovery Centre's collections.

In addition, Gerry was also a collector of British Columbia stamps and postal history. He is widely acknowledged to have had one of the finest collections of postage stamps in Canada, particularly from B.C.'s colonial period. Wellburn auctioned off his collection in 1987 for \$1 million, and in 1990 he published a book on the postal history of British Columbia and Vancouver Island.

(2) AM (name withheld) was possibly a postal clerk at the Duncan Station Post Office.

(3) Mrs. M (name withheld).

(4) The Tzouhalem Hotel was built in 1901 and graced the corner of Front Street and Trunk Road. It was owned and operated by brothers Frank & E.A. Price from 1901 to 1923.

(5) Located on Quamichan Lake, Grove Hall was designed by well known architect Samuel Maclure for Captain John Hirsch who served in the Boer War.



Photo: Cowichan Valley Museum

(6) Henderson's 1909 Directory for the City of Victoria lists Aneta Thain as a musician.

(7) Built in 1874, the Cape Beale Lighthouse was the first lighthouse established in BC. Cape Beale received its name from Charles William Barkley, captain of the Imperial Eagle, who named it for his ship's purser, John Beale.

(8) The March 20, 1902 edition of the Crofton Gazette and Cowichan News mentions Mr. Keast's stable in Crofton - "Here starts the Westholme stage, which Mr. H. Keast of Duncan's and Mt. Sicker fame is running daily to meet every E&N railway train."

(9) Fall Fair, Cowichan Agricultural Society.

(10) An étude or study is an instrumental musical composition, usually short, of considerable difficulty, and designed to provide practice material for perfecting a particular musical skill.

(11) The steamer Tees was built for Union Steamship Co. Newcastle UK in 1893. Tees was owned by the Canadian Pacific Navigation Co., which was purchased by the CPR in 1901. For 10 years she made three trips a month between Victoria and the west coast. She was chartered by, and eventually sold to the Pacific Salvage Co.



Photo: Nauticapedia

(12) William Lowell Thompson was the Cape Beale Lighthouse Head Keeper from 1908 – 1911.

The following, courtesy of Lighthouse Memories, is from the Colonist dated November 1, 1909.

Captain J Gaudin, Agent of Marine and fisheries has received a report concerning the loss of the Banfield motor lifeboat, the wreck of which has been picked up by the Steamer Leebro and will be brought to Victoria for survey and repairs. It seems that the Child of Mr/Mrs Thompson of the Cape Beale lighthouse was ill and in need of medical attention and the mother and child were taken to Ucluelet where the little one died. The lifeboat was not hauled out as usual, having returned after nightfall. A watch was left and when the light was missed the watchman failed to report it. A strong Southeast wind was blowing and nothing could be done until it moderated. Then, the morning after the lifeboat broke adrift, Captain Gillan was taken in the motor yacht Winona of Victoria which happened to be at Banfield Creek to search for the lifeboat which was found on Robbers I. The engines were taken out and the boat floated with the greater part of her starboard side torn out. When the weather abates sufficiently to get the Clo-oose lifeboat and take it to Banfield the wrecked craft will be brought her by Leebro