

Somenos Lake Farm



“Trio on the tractor. Crop of corn in background. 1946.”

L-R: Catherine, Charles, Faith.

Photo: 1990.960.001

The S-amuna’/Somenos Marsh has a long history of occupation and use by the people of the Cowichan Tribes and today is recognized for having significant cultural values to both Cowichan Tribes and other residents of the Cowichan Valley.

S-amuna’ (Somenos) was the largest of the Cowichan Tribes winter villages, located on what is now the site of the BC Forest Discovery Centre

Based on Cowichan Tribes’ oral history, the Cowichan Nation people have a strong connection to the area. *“Since time immemorial, Cowichan Tribes has had a connection to the Somenos Marsh, Lake and Creek. At the time of European contact there were several thousand people living at two Cowichan villages associated with the Marsh – S-amuna’ and Kwa’mutsun. The S-amuna’ (Somenos) Village lined the west side of Somenos Lake (including the present location of the Forest Discovery Centre) and according to Cowichan Elders was 7,000 people strong prior to the epidemics of the mid- 1800s. The Kwa’mutsun (Quamichan) Village lined Somenos Creek extending to the confluence with the Cowichan River. Near the headwaters of Somenos Creek is an ancient burial site known as Ye’yumnuts. These villages benefited from the ready supply of coho and chum salmon that could be harvested even in the off-season during high water levels.”*

Oral History, Cowichan Tribes

S-amuna’ / Somenos Marsh Conservation Area Management Plan

Somenos Farm was first settled in 1911 by Joseph and Elmiere Roy. Mainly focused on producing food for their own consumption, they planted a small orchard and garden, and raised pigs and chickens. The Roys were also well known by their neighbours for making wine and cider.

In March 1934 Guy Stanley Windeyer and his wife Irene Noel Windeyer purchased the Roy property and took up residence shortly thereafter.

Captain Windeyer was born in Australia on December 13, 1900. At the age of twelve he was sent to the Naval Academy in England and entered the British Navy at the tail end of WWI. After being educated at Cambridge, the Navy stationed Windeyer in Tokyo where he was appointed a language officer for the British Embassy.

Irene Noel Power was born in Ireland on December 24, 1903 and met Windeyer while travelling through Japan. Married in Ireland on June 22, 1929 they spent the next several years stationed in China and Malta before Noel retired from the Navy.

In June 1933, Guy and Noel arrived in Vancouver on the CPR Duchess of Richmond, Their first residence in BC was in the Interior where they stayed on a fruit farm near Kootenay Lake. They then moved to the Cowichan Valley where they rented a farm before purchasing the Roy property.

The Windeyers lived at the Somenos Lake Farm for over 43 years. They had three children: Catherine (1934), Faith (1938), and Charles (1941).

Roadside Farm at Duncan Has Far-Flung Appeal

By KLAUS MUENTER

DUNCAN — Customers from as far away as Montreal and San Francisco return each year to one of Vancouver Island's "tourist meccas," the Somenos Lake farm of Cmdr. and Mrs. G. S. Windeyer.

The visitors are attracted by the farm's lush fields and its colorful roadside stand and farm kitchen, the only stop of its kind along many miles of the highway in the area north of Duncan.

★ ★ ★

The retired naval officer, who hails from Tomago, Australia, didn't like the idea of his wife selling farm produce and fresh eggs at the roadside stand when it was started a decade ago. But now Cmdr. and Mrs. Windeyer both say they don't regret the decision to sell.

The farm has long since earned the Windeyers a reputation for harvesting a large variety of top-grade produce.

★ ★ ★

Cmdr. Windeyer actually manages the 120-acre farm next to the new Cowichan Valley forest museum while his Irish-born wife directs the stand and kitchen.

The couple came to the valley in 1934 following Cmdr. Windeyer's retirement from the

Royal Navy. They started a dairy operation but switched to beef cattle in 1951 before the farm slowly developed to its present status.

The farm now has 90 acres of cultivated land and 30 acres of pasture land, with 40 feeders, mostly Herefords and some Highland cattle. There is also a flock of 1,000 chickens.

Cmdr. Windeyer has developed an outstanding variety of fruit trees, while acres of corn, strawberries, early potatoes and many other kinds of garden produce form the backbone of the well-organized farm.



Windeyer

A project close to this farmer's heart is his three acres of black currants. Cmdr. Windeyer predicts a great future for the small, dark berries which are one of the main ingredients of the homemade pies his wife sells at the stand.

Cmdr. Windeyer, keeping in close touch with the latest findings of horticultural science, has organized orchards of dwarf trees, including 3,000 apple, 30 pear, 40 peach and 40 cherry trees.

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The dwarf apple trees, on stock obtained from the Malling Experimental Farm in Kent, England, are doing well in their experimental plot.

They may yield as much as three times more than standard trees per acre and are more easily sprayed, pruned and picked.

At times, the Windeyers employ as many as 30 people during weekdays, depending on the season.

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Their future plans call for an even more attractive stop for road-weary motorists who seem to feel the picturesque oasis is just what they want.

Life since retirement has not been all farming for Cmdr. Windeyer. He served six years during the Second World War with the RCN and was decorated for gallantry while on convoy duty in the North Atlantic.

The Daily Colonist
July 1, 1964

Sources:

1. S-amuna' / Somenos Marsh Conservation Area Management Plan, 2016.
2. Somenos Lake Farm: Historical Background, Jenny E. Fredrickson—BC Forest Museum, 1990.
3. 1990.960 Photos, Somenos Farm Collection, BC Forest Discovery Centre.



"Off on our holiday to the States, August 1938". New garage behind.

L-R: Guy, Irene, Catherine.

Photo: 1990.960.031



Somenos Jersey Dairy

Photo: 1990.960.013



“Kendal With Muscovy Ducks—July 1947”

L-R: Marigold, Kendall (with bucket), Bernard, Peach, Rupert, Tutu, Emmett

Photo: 1990.960.028



Marry Cassels in front of stall.

c. 1957