

THE TIMBER INDUSTRY IN THE WHITE ROCK AREA.

¢

As the community of "hite Rock becomes increasingly urban and the now vacant lots are rapidly occupied it will become more and more difficult to ~~visual~~ visualize White Rock as it was only a half century ago. This last week, ^{Jan 1957} a fire destroyed eight homes over looking the bay. The conflagration uncovered the stump of a giant Douglas fir. Trees six feet in girth such as this ^{represents} were higher than today's telephone poles when John Cabot first sighted continental North America in 1497.

Stumps still in evidence on uncleared lots and acreage in White Rock remind us that South Surrey was once densely covered with some of the finest timber that modern man has ever utilized. Today, White Rock property owners regard the district as residential community and most would prefer to keep industry at a distance but it was industry — the lumber industry that gave the district its first impetus in development and sustained it for three decades while its resort and residential ^{virtues} ~~virtues~~ had not yet been publicized and exploited. Of the three earliest families to come to White Rock to homestead two made logging or lumbering an adjunct to agriculture.

The Roper family came to the White Rock area in 1881 from Kentucky and homesteaded on a quarter section where Stayte Road and Campbell River Road meet today, on the site now occupied by the 7th Day Adventist Church. Mrs. Ariminta Spangler, now a resident of Blaine, Washington, a daughter of the Ropers was the first white child born in White Rock. Robert Roper, the father, died in 1889 but John Christian Roper, the eldest son, and his brothers, operated a logging camp between the Nickomekl River and what is now North Bluff Road. At this time the

entire southern slope was a solid mass of beautiful timber, The Ropers sold a large part of this cut to the Royal City Sawmills. Oxen were commonly used by the Ropers in their operations. Subsequently the Gilley Brothers of New Westminster logged along the Northwestern end of the present White Rock area. The oxen, first used, gave way to horses and donkey engines as the assault on the forests became more ^xexpensive.

Another pioneer family who engaged early in the timber industry was the Thrifts. Henry Thomas Thrift came to the Hazelmore district in 1884 by way of Ontario, California, Victoria and Yale. Before H.T. Thrift became reeve of Surrey in 1891 he served successively as municipal clerk, assessor and collector and a mail carrier between Clover Valley (Cloverdale) Hall's Prairie and Langley Prairie. In 1902 George Thrift the oldest of the Thrift boys opened a lumber mill in the half section property of his father.

In the early logging industry the old Great Northern Railway played a major role. The lumber mill at Hazelmore shipped both lumber and logs to New Westminster on the railroad. The Great Northern carried also cedar bolts, 16 feet in length to the Royal City Sawmills ^{Company} ~~Company~~ for manufacture into shingles.

Mr. Thrift, now our Honorary Chairman, speaks with pride of the fine trees that were cut in those days in the Hazelmore district. Nearly all of them were 4 to 6 feet in diameter, one measured 9 feet across. The Thrift mill operated until 1906 when George Thrift opened the Hazelmore general store and sold his mill to Harold Hunter and Frank Fox, two American ~~xx~~ investors who were to play a prominent part in the South Surrey lumber trade in the next two decades. The

Hazelmere mill operated until it was burned down in 1912. In the first ten years of the century Hunter operated shingle mills also: a one machine mill on Banford Road not far from the present intersection of the Campbell River Road and Pacific Highway, a three machine plant where the Semiahmoo Cabins are today, a three machine mill at Crescent and a single machine mill at Colebrook.

It was in a bunkhouse at one of the Hunter Company mills that one Japanese shingle bolt cutter murdered another in December, 1909

With the destruction of the Hazelmere mill the Fox-Hunter interests decided to rebuild on a new site at the mouth of the Campbell River. When the new plant opened in the fall of 1913 the executive (all American) included H.W. Hunter of Blaine as president, Frank Fox as Vice President, K.C. Hunter as secretary, A.E. Hunter as Treasurer, and Fred Hunter as a director. Mr. William Moffatt was chief engineer,

The enterprise began in high hopes of success. The new extensive plant with its complement of 150 or more men caused a building boom ~~along~~ along the waterfront and at the east end of the present community area. Many Chinese were employed and were accommodated in bunkhouses near where the present Catholic church is on the Indian reserve and near ^{where} the old dam is at the Campbell River mouth. Although there was a bunkhouse for the Japanese a number of them built houses behind where the Park Cafe stands today. A large deserted house now a landmark north of the Sewage disposal plant was built by a Japanese worker for his wife and family. A few East Indians also were employed at the plant. At first logs continued to come by rail from the

Hazelmere -- East Kensington area. Then timber limits on Hernando Island and the Columbia valley in the Sumas, Chilliwack area were utilized.

After an auspicious beginning the Campbell River Lumber Company went bankrupt in 1914 and George Bremner of the Bank of Montreal in New Westminster was appointed by the creditors as receiver in charge of operations. With the improved market conditions brought by the war in 1914 the indebtedness was soon wiped out and the plant returned to the hands of the company. By 1921 the business was sufficiently established to warrant extensive improvements. Such apparatus as a band head-rig, band re-saw and a gang saw were then added to the plant. In its best days the plant cut over 150,000 feet of lumber. It had seven dry kilns and with its sizers, 3 matchers and a sticker produced all types of dimension lumber, shiplap, flooring and molding. Sometimes in the early 20's as many as 250 men were employed. There were often two shifts operating in the sawmill. The Canadian prairie market took most of the mills' output but many scowloads for export were taken from the end of the mill pier which ran out by the Campbell River mouth (the stubs of the old pier piling can still be seen today). Lumber for the scows was hauled out to the end of the 1600 foot pier on two wheeled carts drawn by jitneys or in the Ross carrier purchased by the mill. A steam crane was installed at the pier end for loading the scows. The scows when loaded were towed by tug boat at high tide for loading on deep sea vessels at Chemainus, Vancouver or New Westminster. Some orders, particularly of heavy timbers known as "Jap squares" were destined for the Orient. A constant source of difficulty at the pier end was the danger of the heavily loaded scows bumping the shallow bottom of the bay. More than one scow became leaky or was smashed open by this hazard.

In its last few years operating costs of the mill were increased by the necessity of ^{bringing} ~~dumping~~ logs from the Chilliwack river area. Timber was floated down the Veddar canal to the Fraser then towed down to the mouth of the Fraser and into Semiahmoo bay. The tugs, the Camloco ~~2~~ (named after the lumber company) and the Almira did the boom hauling. The lumber company had a breakwater near the river mouth and a dam at the river mouth to ensure there would be enough water for floating the logs to the edge of the mill where there was a hoist on the river bank.

When the mill closed in the autumn of 1927 its failure was due to two causes, the declining ^{of the timber} ~~ing~~ in the quality and a regression in the market. Many of the fine looking trees cut in the Columbia valley area and delivered at great expense to the mill proved to be of such old growth that they were over-mature. The resulting lumber was stained in appearance and was graded low by the high standards of that period thirty years ago when only good lumber was marketable. The other cause of the mill's failure was perhaps even more significant. Harassed to the point where financial support was needed until the timber and market problems could be solved the company found prospective financiers wary of an impending depression. Hopeful of obtaining aid from the Great Northern Railway company to whom it had been a good customer ^{through} ~~though~~ 15 years the Lumber compnay found itself thwarted and driven to terminate operations. When the plant closed, employees of long standing hung about for ^{months} ~~months~~, encouraged by ^{rumors} ~~rumors~~ of a reopening. But the mill was finished for all time. Gradually, its machinery was dismantled and sold piecemeal to satisfy creditors. What a fire did not accomplish in destroying the buildings time and the elements are relentlessly completing. With The death of the Campbell River Lumber Company an

6.
ra in White Rock's development passed away. But White Rock is more fortunate than scores of lumber towns in B.C., Washington and Oregon, now ghosts of a former existence.

Since 1909 when the Great Northern had altered its route to skirt the margin of the bay many Vancouver and New Westminster residents had been exploring the sea side resort potentialities of White Rock. An advertisement in the May 27th edition of the British Columbian ran as follows,

"White Rock, the ^{ideal} ~~ideal~~ summer resort . Camping, bathing, fishing, boating. Four trains daily each way. Lots from \$225 to \$350. Double corner \$575- \$850. Easy terms. White Shiles and Company, 628 and 746 Columbia Street, new Westminster.

White Rock is fortunate in possessing and utilizing the resources of scenery, ~~and~~ a specially wholesome climate and nearness to urban areas.

J. Ray Stewart.
March 18, 1957

Based on interviews with Mr. George Shift, Mr. W.E. Johnson,
Mrs. Potter, Mr. W. Moffat