

Churches spend century keeping the faith

It is no coincidence the settlement of White Rock and (the now) First United Church congregation have shared a century of togetherness.

It all started in 1910, the year after the arrival of the railroad, when Rev. W.P. Goard, a retired Methodist minister and land speculator, began conducting services in his home near Oxford Road.

Within months, his house burned and he and his family moved to Vancouver, but not before he had performed White Rock's first recorded marriage.

Goard left the faith in good hands – those of Henry Thrift and postmaster Fred Philp, who improvised by holding Sunday School classes on Thrift's lawn, and prayer sessions and hymn-singing in Philp's house. Services took on a more formal tone in the schoolhouse on Thrift's property, until the church was built on Prospect Avenue in 1913.

From the beginning, church membership read like a Who's Who of early White Rock.

The business of organizing and constructing a church was not new to Thrift. He had earlier donated land for a church building at Hazelmere, "on the condition that it be a Union Church open to people of any faith."

Under the auspices of the Methodists, White Rock's first church was also designated a Union Church. By this

time, other church supporters had arrived, among them the Vidal and Hughes families, tireless lifetime members.

Columbia College in New Westminster provided student ministers, and help as needed came from a reserve of retired ministers resident in Ocean Park.

The congregation numbered 35 by 1915.

At times, churchgoers employed at the Campbell River Lumber Co. mill found it hard to take part in church events at the other side of town. The Anglicans helped out, allowing services to take place in their new church on Victoria Avenue, as long as a qualified minister was in charge.

White Rock was growing quickly, though, and the congregation had outgrown its original building.

In 1920, two lots were purchased on Victoria Avenue near Johnston Road. The new Union church opened on April 9, 1922, with seating for more than 200.

Among other groups, the Red Cross and Boy Scouts met regularly in the church schoolroom. In 1923, the marriage of Marion Philp and Gordon Cottingham was the first in the new church.

Upon entering the United Church of
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Lorraine and Hugh Ellenwood

historical perspective



Photo courtesy of White Rock Museum & Archives

The church built on Prospect Avenue near Oxford Road in 1913 by the Methodists was open to community members of any faith.

Church served as community hall

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Canada in 1925, the congregation purchased new pews and built a bridge across the ditch leading to the church.

Although the building still served as a quasi community hall, tolerance was not unlimited. It did not extend to the White Rock branch of the Ku Klux Klan, who asked permission to hold meetings in the church basement in 1926. And in 1928, church spokesmen asked Surrey council to support their motion opposing Sunday baseball games.

Although the church was expanded and rededicated in 1952, it was destined to suffer the fate of its predecessor.

The Women's Auxiliary had been active since 1950 raising funds. Dr. Allan Hogg headed a building committee, and the cornerstone of First United Church at the corner of Buena Vista Avenue and Centre Street was put in place in the fall of 1957.

On Feb. 16, 1958, the first service was held with Rev. Peter Kelly, B.C.'s legendary aboriginal United Church leader, preaching the sermon.

White Rock's first resident minister was B. Hedley Balderston. Another early incumbent, Rev. W.C. Frank, had represented the White Rock area on Surrey council during the Second World War.

The longest-serving was Howard Filsinger, who retired in 1995 after shepherding the flock for 32 years. He had baptized 1,228 babies and performed 1,477 marriages.

For the church's

anniversary service in April 1950, B.C.'s only woman minister at the time, Rev. Norah Hughes, was invited to occupy the pulpit.

And, to further acknowledge women's leadership, the congregation honoured local resident Lydia Gruchy in 1986, on the 50th anniversary of her ordination as the first woman to be admitted to the United Church

of Canada ministry.

Deservedly, for a hundred years, the church has enjoyed a high community profile.

Through those years, many local organizations have had occasion to appreciate White Rock's first congregation for adopting and maintaining an inclusivity concept.

Congratulations, First

United.

The Peninsula's best-known mother-and-son historians, Lorraine and Hugh Ellenwood, are dedicated to preserving local history through the White Rock Museum & Archives. If you want to learn more about White Rock's history, or if you want to share your memories, call 604-541-2222 or email whiterockarchives@telus.net

Hailed as one of the neatest country churches in British Columbia, the new Methodist Church was completed in 1922.



Photo courtesy of White Rock Museum & Archives