

lifestyles

Relief in sight

Day trippers to White Rock beach wanting 'to spend a penny' these days find themselves in a bit of a quandary, as restaurant operators and other business people can verify.

The public comfort stations at east and west Marine Drive are currently being rebuilt, leaving only the one at the pier to accommodate those caught short.

At least, there's relief in sight, which is more than the crowds arriving by train a century ago could hope for. How they coped is best left to the imagination.

Frugal Surrey legislators (at that time White Rock was part of Surrey) harboured little generosity towards the invaders who left garbage behind every summer weekend. In fact, they resented having to provide creature comforts for any who did not pay taxes in Surrey.

Finally, in 1925, council installed toilets in the basement of the police station at the pier. Despite installation of flush toilets in 1949 in Semiahmoo Park, and upgrades at the pier site two years later, the health department considered the lack of facilities a menace to public health.

Brent Pravitz, clerk at the GNR depot from 1942 to 1960, recalled, "The ladies' restroom (at the GNR station) was the busiest spot in town. It was the only



At various times from the 1920s to the '70s, the building at the foot of the pier (above) served as police station, jail, library, Chamber of Commerce office, and washrooms. Above right, the public washrooms in 1980; below, washrooms at West Beach are torn down last year.



Photos courtesy of White Rock Museum & Archives

changing room for the whole White Rock beach."

A *Semiahmoo Sun* editorial in April 1950 lamented, "Now that spring is actually here, one of THE questions of the day is, 'What, oh what, are the people to do for restrooms?' Would it not be possible to have some erected, and if we are as financially low as folks are hinting, make them pay by metre [sic]."

Bleak as the situation seemed, things got worse. The comfort station at Balsam Street was torn down, and Ward 5 (White Rock) Councillor V.A. McPherson

said he was not justified to spend the money

to rebuild for the benefit of mainly non-residents. Frustrated, the Board of Trade accepted council's offer to pay two-thirds of the replacement cost, if the board raised the balance. The volunteer labour of the Board of Trade and Lions Club members kept the cost down to \$2,004, and the station was finished in time for summer 1952.

It didn't help matters that vandals ripped out the plumbing of the pier site and otherwise abused the place so that it required constant repair and paint.

A new washroom, opened at Oxford Street in 1956, was hailed as "very popular, and filled a long-felt need in the stretch of picnic area from Martin Street to the bottom of the hill towards Ocean Park." Not to seem overly hospitable, the buildings closed in winter.

The grim situation continued into the 1960s, peaking in a report to council in

August 1961. Mayor Harry Douglass agreed White Rock should not have to provide toilet facilities for the whole Lower Mainland.

That was not the only barrier. There's the unusual circumstance that the City of White Rock doesn't own its front yard. The new washrooms at Balsam Street and at Oxford Street are sitting on railway property, as were their predecessors. The land is leased, and all proposed buildings must be approved by the railway authority.

City manager Peggy Clark anticipates the new washrooms will be opened by the third week of May.

The Peninsula's best-known mother-and-son historians, Lorraine and Hugh Ellenwood, are dedicated to preserving history through the White Rock Museum & Archives. Call 604-541-2222, or email whiterockarchives@telus.net



Lorraine and Hugh Ellenwood
historical perspective