

Origins of present-day Sechelt

For thousands of years the Sechelt First Nation lived in various villages and camps on the Sunshine Coast and up the Inlets to the north. Around 1868 several bands settled permanently at Chatelech (later known as Sechelt) where they built a chapel, a school and homes in the Trail Bay area.

Although the various settlements of the Sunshine Coast had been linked by roads and tracks, from early days the Coast was accessible only by water so development naturally occurred along the waterfronts. Sechelt was serviced by the Union Steamship Company's passenger vessels from the 1890s until the 1950s when the Black Ball car ferries started sailing from Horseshoe Bay to Gibson's and, in 1957, to the Langdale terminal.

Thomas J. Cook, wife Sarah and baby daughter Ada, arrived in Sechelt on April 5th, 1894 and were the first white settlers to take up permanent residence in Sechelt. They lived in a one room log cabin for a few months until Thomas Cook finished a larger home near the foot of Shorncliffe Avenue in time for the Christmas of 1894.

Soon after Alfred Whitaker and his family arrived in Vancouver from England his son Herbert visited the Sechelt area, saw the potential for tourism and resource industries and, with his father, pre-empted land on the west side of Porpoise Bay. By 1895, after he had moved to Sechelt, Herbert acquired the land from Porpoise Bay to Trail Bay: present day Sechelt. In the short space of thirty years Herbert owned two hotels, a series of stores, two steamship companies, the local wharves, five logging camps and two sawmills and several holiday cottages. After his death in 1925 the Union Steamship Company bought his properties and businesses and ran them for another thirty years until, in 1956, the company turned over the governing of Sechelt to its residents.



9- Our Lady of the Rosary Church, built in 1889-1890 by the Sechelt First Nation, was a landmark for passing ships from 1890 until 1906 when it burned down. The picture shows the dedication ceremony on June 10, 1890, attended by First Nations, clergy and brass bands from all over British Columbia.



2- Herbert Whitaker built several revenue cottages in the early 1900s one of which, Green Cottage, is still standing.



4- This lovely hotel, built in 1899 for Herbert Whitaker, catered to numerous summer visitors from Vancouver until it burned down in 1914.



6- The middle building was Herbert Whitaker's second store. It also served for a few months as the first school until in 1913 Sechelt's first telegraph office took over the premises. Herbert's fourth store is the larger building.



8- At the east of the wharf, where today's playground stands, Herbert Whitaker built his third store which became the second hotel after the original one burned down in 1914.



1- Thomas John Cook's second log cabin, built in 1894, was located just west of Snickett Park.



3- This imposing home was built for Alfred and Henrietta Whitaker and their seven children. It later became 'The Sechelt Inn' until destroyed by fire in 1964 and was located where the Driftwood Inn and Pebbles Restaurant are today.



5- The dance pavilion with tea room, was built by Herbert Whitaker and enlarged by Union Steamship Company Estates. During the summer months dance bands traveled on the Union Steamship Company vessels from Vancouver to play for residents and visitors. After 1956 the building housed many businesses; a movie theatre, men's dress shop, doctor's office, salal plant and even a roller skating rink until fire destroyed it in the 1970s.



7- Herbert Whitaker built two wharves, one at the end of Wharf Road and the other in front of the family home. His Sechelt Steamship Company vessels sailed between Vancouver and the Sunshine Coast in competition with the Union Steamship Company and the All Red Line until his death in 1925. The present wharf stands just east of Herbert's.

The totem poles, commissioned by the Union Steamship Company and erected in 1928, were carved by Paul Weenah of Rivers Inlet assisted by three Sechelt First Nation carvers Dan and Mike Paul and Frank Isadore. The totem poles were moved to Bowen Island in 1955.

