

Notch Hill Hall the oldest in the Shuswap

A Shuswap Passion column for the Shuswap Market News

By Jim Cooperman

This column's series on community halls begins with the oldest hall in the Shuswap, the Notch Hill Hall. This hall has been run by a community association ever since it was built in 1910 on land donated by the adjacent farmers, the Sjodin family. The records of most of the Association's meetings since 1909 have been preserved and now serve as an archival record for one of the Shuswap's oldest communities.

Notch Hill was named for the notch between the mountains where the CPR laid its tracks in 1885 and where the highway was once located. For years this was a CPR town with a packing house, freight shed, oil tank, water tank, coal chute, sand house, pump house, and a round house, as well as stores and a hotel. Prior to the introduction of the diesel locomotives, steam pusher locomotives were used to move the heavy freight and passenger trains up what was then the steepest grade in Canada.

In the old days, the Notch Hill Hall was the centre of the community and was well used for dances, basket socials, masquerade balls, concerts and meetings. While the hall is now closed during the winter to save on heating costs, it still gets used for regular potluck suppers and bake sales, as well as for private functions such as weddings, birthday parties, and family reunions and as a polling station during elections.

The biggest yearly event at the hall is the Canadian Holiday Train. Last year, there were 1200 people taking part in the festivities, enjoying the entertainment and providing donations for the Sorrento food bank. Over 3,000 pounds of food was donated along with \$800, which was topped off with an additional \$1000 from the CPR. Also, the hall association invited the train employees into the hall for a dinner prepared by volunteers.

The hall property also includes two heritage buildings, the Notch Hill School built in 1921 and the old Presbyterian Church built in 1906 and moved to its current site in 2004. Restoration efforts for the church included new windows that were built locally to match the original ones. Although it is not used by a congregation, the church is still a popular place for local weddings. Inside the old school are some of the original desks and blackboards, along with some old photos.

Notch Hill Hall Association president Floyd Adams is proud of all the volunteer effort and local funding support that helps to maintain and improve the community's three heritage buildings. He hopes that one day this property will become a community park so that more local residents and tourists can utilize and appreciate the property and its heritage values. The Association is also thankful for the B.C. Lottery Corporation funding which helps to cover the hall's operating costs.

As a result of Floyd's leadership and a great deal of local volunteer efforts, the hall has seen many improvements over the last decade, including new siding, re-furbished flooring and indoor washroom facilities. And Floyd appreciates the support provided by the CSRD and the Area C director, Ted Bacigalupo, who is a big fan of community halls.

Ted recently observed how, “Community halls and societies bind communities together and provide a link from the past to the future.” The Notch Hill Hall is certainly a prime example of this linkage to the past and thanks to the efforts of Floyd and the Notch Hill team of volunteers, it will continue to provide a heritage link long into the future.