

HISTORICAL DATA RELATING TO PRODUCER'S

(compiled by Lyn Rose)

Looking back as early as 1907 the history of the gravel pit in Metchosin was recorded in various sources such as the Archives, libraries, Land Title offices, Marine museum and past employees memories and records.

In the beginning the pit was made up of parcels of land approximately 9 acres in size which were purchased at various times from individuals in the area. Some of the earliest records show that boundaries were shown by a number of links in a fence by the number of chains. The land ran from Royal Roads along the shoreline to the present location.

Charles and William Griffiths bought the land from Samuel George Featherstone for \$3000.00 on November 5, 1907, together with all building fixtures, common ways, rights of easements, tenements and hereditament involved. The pit was then known as being in the Esquimalt District.

In 1913 the British Columbia Sand and Gravel Co. Ltd. and Vancouver's Producer's Rock and Gravel Company Limited were incorporated to become the British Columbia Sand and Gravel Limited.

Hard times hit everyone and in 1928 the pit was in receivership and bought out by Mr. Simpson who owned it for 20 years and in 1929 the name was officially changed to Producer's 1929 Ltd. Mr. Simpson's son Phillip was an employee in the purchasing department.

The pit was sold to Evans Coleman and Johnson with one of the owners being Premier Byron Johnson. This was affiliated with the Vancouver operation of Evans Coleman and Evans. Many items were sold by this company, items from Asphalt shingles, concrete blocks, dampers, fireplaces, gratings, pipe, tiles, windows and vents to name but a few. An elaborate manual was produced to help the customer define the products available and many helpful hints were included in the use of the products.

In 1948 the company was sold to the Gilley Brothers. On January 2, 1964 it changed hands to Ocean Cement Ltd until December 1971 when it was bought by Genstar Corporation and in September 1986 it became CBR Cement. The company changed hands many times over the years and sometimes the name change did not occur until much later. In the end it was known as "Producer's Pit" irrespective of who owned it at that time.

Past employees such as Marvin Parker, Alex Murray and Phil Simpson were helpful with information of the history, as their relatives were some of the very early people involved with the pit. A lot of the people who worked at the pit also lived on site and many marriages were formed through the various families involved at that time.

Dola Acres kindly supplied us with many photographs from the earlier days of the pit.

In 1926 there were 8 employees at the operation using equipment which included a crusher. Later on a 3/4 Bay City shovel and a Lima 3 yard loader were added to the fleet. Most of the material was manhandled to the barges with the use of a wheel barrow and the crew would use a block and tackle to lift the material.

The tugs were capable of towing 3 scows at a time and each scow was filled in the range of 300 yards of material. Some of these barges were self unloaders and it would take approximately 10 hours to load a barge. A lot of material went to the Seattle and Port Angeles area to be used in the construction of roads. At this time the Pit owned it's own scow fleet and tug boat. The name of the tug was "Mystery". This was in the 1920's, the company also used tugs from Champion White company. Sales were in the range of 200,000 tonnes per year.

In the beginning the Scows were loaded by wheelbarrow which was extremely time consuming. A conveyor system was installed but the chute was moved by hand and a capstan moved the material to loadout. Miles of belts were used to move the material from the road to the scows. The wharf was extended many times to accommodate the build up of sand on the beach. Winters were extremely hard on the dock and each spring it was necessary to repair the pilings.

The Wooden boats which were discarded by CN used to be dragged to the beach front of the pit and set on fire.

The primary early landowners were the Murray family, who originated in Scotland and were carpenters and they arrived in the early 1900's. Mr. Murray senior was in the Rebellion of 1885 and came to BC in 1918. They settled in Colwood when there was only one store and a post office in the area. They were also the keepers of 200 head of sheep which grazed on the land. Sheep fences can still be found today to indicate this as a reality.

There was no road to the pit at this time and everything was shipped out by scow. It was not until 1937 that the trucks were able to access the pit to carry material, this being the time the road was built. There was a road to Metchosin in 1918 but there was no access to the pit. Gratton Road was the first road and the name of the Metchosin Road was changed from Albert Head Road.

The road that was eventually put in was a gravel road and many potholes were constantly present causing many problems for the trucks. The road was originally dug with the use of an Orton shovel. The company also did a lot of outside contract work which included the digging of many house basements in what is the Belmont Park area.