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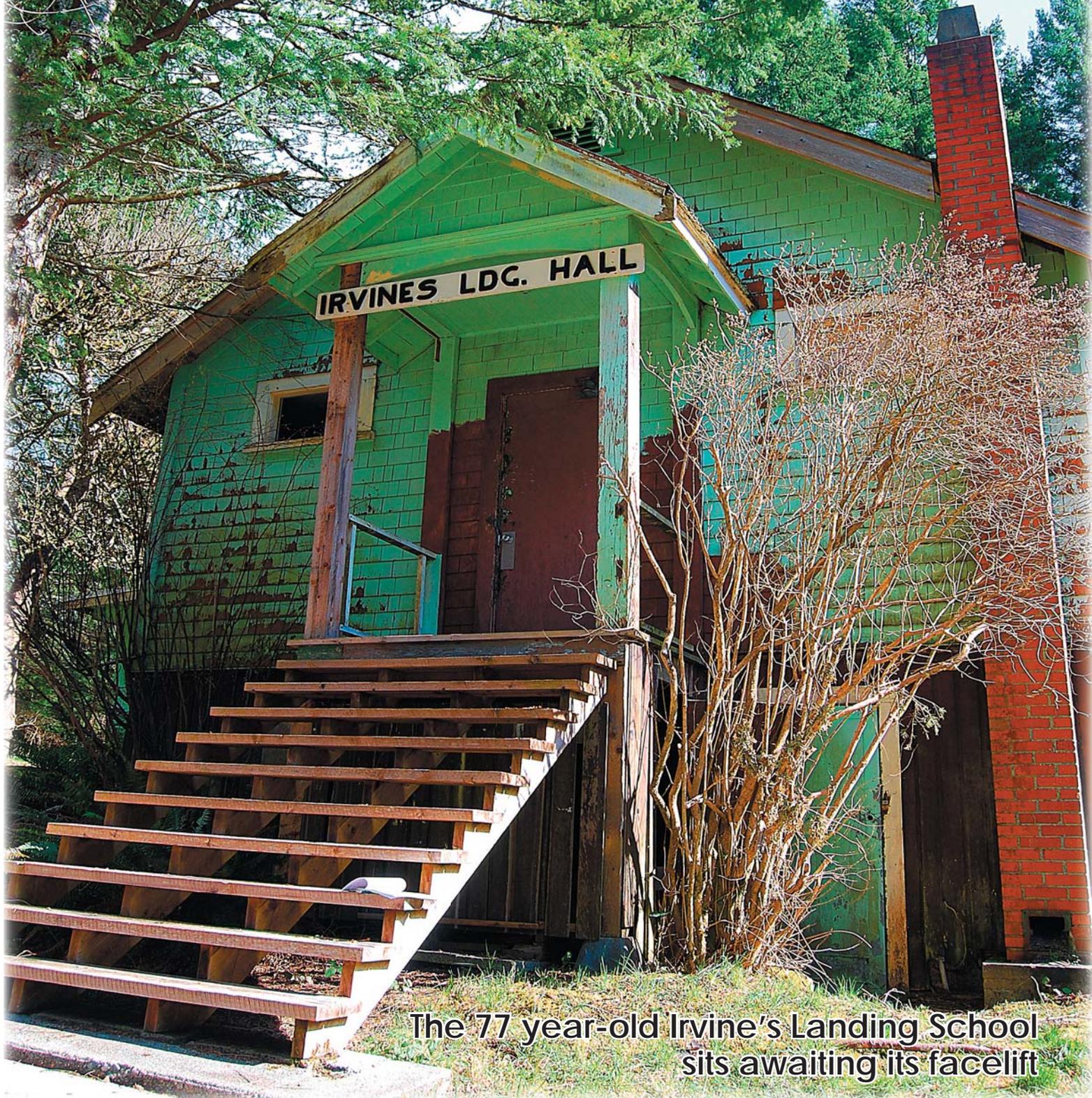
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IRVINES LDG. HALL

The 77 year-old Irvine's Landing School
sits awaiting its facelift



77-year-old Irvine's Landing School gets facelift

By Brian Lee

In 2002, School District #46 identified three properties they wanted to sell to raise funds.

All were in Area A and consisted of the Madeira Park property next to the elementary school (often called the "Teacherage"), the Egmont School and the Irvine's Landing School property across from Hotel Lake.

Area A representative John Rees proposed that the SCR D purchase all three but, by this time, the school board had changed their position on the sale of the properties and only agreed to relinquish the Egmont school property (though the deal was made without any money changing hands).

While the Madeira Park site remains in limbo, the SCR D came back to the table with an offer for a lease on the Irvine's Landing School property and, after a generous donation of \$40,000 from by developers of nearby Pender Harbour Landing, a 20-year lease was secured to provide Irvine's Landing and Garden Bay with a community meeting place.

Pender Harbour Landing also offered up a link to their septic system to save considerable cost and land usage as the property is restored.

It should be noted the developers of Pender Harbour Landing made their offer after all of the approvals were in place for their subdivision to move ahead.



This first meeting on March 29 was intended to open up the building and to assess the work needed. It might seem that the job at hand is greater than the group assembled to tackle it but they're already proving that assumption wrong.

Developer Bob Fielding requested the new building be renamed the Sarah Wray Heritage Hall, after a woman many believe to be the first non-native woman to live in Pender Harbour.

Her daughter, also named Sarah, was the first non-native child born in Pender Harbour on September 5, 1897.

About 30 community members met at the site on a sunny and warm afternoon on March 29 to officially open the building, survey the work needed and strike the appropriate committees to see the project through.

The hall isn't much to look at right

now, inside or out.

Years of vandalism and weeds have taken their toll but the building has a recent roof and is still in great shape structurally.

In an informal ceremony that afternoon, John Rees handed the keys for the building (and a personal cheque for \$500) over to Eric Graham, the interim chairperson of the Sarah Wray Heritage Hall committee.

Graham didn't even try to hide the fact that what excites him most is the prospect of finally ridding his basement of the chairs he'd acquired last year for the building.

School board representative Mary Bittroff touched on building's bright future when she said,

"From what I've seen in other communities, when you take ownership and make this into your little community centre, there's no school board that would ever dare take it back from you."

Though the regional district carries the lease and insurance, the restoration

is at the mercy of fundraising efforts by committee members and the community in general.

The group spearheading the building's restoration is undoubtedly one of the best-organized committees around.

Within days they had mobilized subcommittees to handle all aspects of the building restoration and much work has already been completed.

Services donated by Sunshine Coast Pest Control have rid the building of various critters and crawlies while landscaping efforts outside have already dramatically altered the property itself.

An immediate task is the formation of a non-profit society so the committee can apply for various grants.

A number of well-qualified volunteers have stepped forward to help in this area.

IRVINE'S LANDING SCHOOL HISTORY

Irvine's Landing was the first area in Pender Harbour settled by non-natives.

It was a vital hub as the local stop for the Union Steamships which brought supplies and people from all over the coast.

By the 1930s, there were a number of large families living in the area.

The Wrays, Gooldrups, Lees, Edwardsons, Kennedys, Dubois, and Duncans are only some of the families who scratched a living from the near-bounty of ocean and forest.

The Irvine's Landing School building opened in 1931 on land donated by the owners of the Irvine's Landing Hotel, Joseph Gonsalves and his son-in-law, Theodore Dames.

It was referred to as the "new" school because kids were previously taught in a building behind the Irvine's Landing Hotel where the vacant restaurant sits now.

This first school later achieved

historical significance as the home of Elizabeth Smart when she wrote her famous novel *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*.

By all accounts the Irvine's Landing School was a community project.

There were no roads into Irvine's Landing so the school was built with local labour and materials.

Work picnics were held at the site and the kids helped clear the land for their playground, rewarded with "ice-cream dixie cups packed in dry ice," according to the late Jean Braun (née Lee).

"Miss Moscrop was our teacher. She boarded at Art Dinghman's place (later Whittaker's Pinehaven)," recalled Braun.

"It was right up by Hotel Lake where we carried water from and stored it in a crock with a tap at the bottom.

"The students took turns filling the water and putting up the flag."

There were two other schools in Pender Harbour at the time, one at Donnelly's Landing and one in Klein-

dale.

Students from all three schools would get together for sports competitions on Victoria Day.

"We were very proud when we could bring the 'Shield' home to our school which we did very often," says Braun.

"The Edwardson kids were fast runners and I held our end up by winning the high jumps."

Muriel Cameron (née Wray) attended the Irvine's School from the start and recalls it had anywhere between 20 and 30 kids at one time.

She said the kids all faced forward to the entrance by the road where the cloak room sits and on the wall of the cloak room was a black board.

The teacher sat at the front of the class early on but, by the '50s, Linda Mattis (née Lee) recalls, the teacher sat at the back by the wood heater.

A common complaint back then concerned the bathroom facilities.

When the school was built there was an outhouse at the back of the

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Sunshine Coast Museum & Archives photo #1829

The front of the school then was much like it is now except for 77 years of tree growth.



Lee family collection photo

The area around the school has changed dramatically over the years. No roads... just trails.

property but that was eventually replaced by a shaky platform added to the back of the school that had a flush toilet but was uncomfortably open to the elements.

Braun recalled that her second teacher at the Irvine's Landing School was Clara Tippett who later married Frank Lee and taught at the Madeira Park Elementary school.

"Aunt Clara Tippet was our teacher around 1935-37. Maggie Wray was the janitor for the school.

"We sure got heck from her when one of our Halloween tricks was stuffing the chimney with gunny sacks," Braun said.

"We went to school early next morning to see the results.

"Smoke pouring out of every door and window until Mrs. Wray got Tiffy up on the roof to pull the stuff out of the chimney; that's when he spotted us in the bush laughing and the smoke started coming our way.

"We didn't get punished however."

The Wrays lived next door to the school property and were the school's closest neighbours.

"Mr. (Charlie) Wray and Tiffy sawed the wood for the big wood heater that warmed the school."

Tiffy Wray passed away in November of 2006 but lived there until only a

few years ago.

Muriel Cameron remembers the school only went to Grade 8 and then students would transfer to the "Superior" school at Donnelly's Landing.

Herb Smith taught at Irvine's Landing until her eighth year before switching over at the same time to teach her once again when she went to school at Donnelly's Landing.

Jean Braun claimed hers was the first Grade 9 class in Pender Harbour at Donnelly's in 1939.

Attending the Donnelly's Landing school required a rowboat trip across the harbour from Irvine's Landing every morning and Braun recalls

Eddie Edwardson made the trip in a dugout canoe.

“He would always beat us when we raced no matter how hard we rowed, except for the days when I was allowed to use Grandpa’s putt putt.

“Then we would throw him a towline.”

The big bank of windows in the school faces due west and, with even fewer trees than there are now, the afternoon sun must have been relentless.

In a 1950s predecessor to our present seafood school fundraisers, Linda Mattis remembers her dad, Norman Lee, helped to raise money for venetian blinds by catching and smoking herring for a kippered herring sale.

The kids hocked the kippers and the school received some badly needed protection from the sun.

The school continued until around 1957 when it was renovated into a community hall.

Robi Petraschuk remembers a New Year’s Eve dance at the hall in 1964 where everyone was having such a good time that when they went to leave, they discovered four feet of snow.

“There was no way our cars could make it home so at around 2:30 a.m. we decided that, since we had lots of firewood, food, booze and music, we’d just keep the party going!”

Much later on the building was abandoned and fell into disrepair.

There was the odd weak attempt at resurrecting the building but nothing was accomplished until the recent push for its restoration.

The investment of time and energy into the building of the Irvine’s Landing School was symbolic of how the community of Pender Harbour was evolving beyond its frontier, resource extraction roots and becoming a per-



Sunshine Coast Museum & Archives photo #1831

It was a nice looking building. Later additions to the back and sides weren’t quite as tastefully designed and their current state of disrepair adds to the overall look of deterioration.

manent settlement.

With other schools in Kleindale, Silver Sands and Donnelly’s Landing Pender Harbour was thriving with young families who viewed education as a priority for their children.

Resources meant riches and it

made perfect sense to live nearby.

Irvine’s Landing has an abundance of vacant property these days — maybe when the lease is up in 20 years there’ll be a need for a school once again.