

STEVENSON

Early Days in Ocean Park as told by Vivian Falconer and Georgina Strachan, daughters of Surrey Pioneers Ben Stevenson of Stevenson Road (128th Ave) and Emelia Stevenson (nee Johnston of Johnston Road family).

Our Father had acquired some 350 acres here in Ocean Park. He owned a large portion of the land in Ocean Park, which extended from 16th Avenue to 24th Avenue bordering Stevenson Road (128th) and Ocean Park Road. This is where our earliest memories of Ocean Park over seventy years ago began.

Ben and Emelia raised a family of eight children – the five oldest children of the family were born here in Ocean Park.

The family home overlooked Semiahmoo Bay in Ocean Park. The large three-storey house had a colourful history. With a veranda all around the outside, it was an impressive home. It did have central heating, with a furnace in the basement – and Georgina remembers that there was only one heating duct covered by a grate, which was in the centre hall of the house. The house also had an impressive fireplace in the dining room.



BEN STEVENSON

When the oldest child (John) reached school age, Father donated the land for a school at 24th and Ocean Park Road so that John and the other children could be educated locally. This school is still in use today. When John reached high school age, he was sent to private school in New Westminster. The family later moved to New Westminster for a few years and then on to Vancouver, so all the children could finish their schooling.

There was active logging in the field across from the main house. This is the area where all the children were indoctrinated into country living, spending many summer holidays here. It was such fun!

Father had given the right of way to the then Great Northern Railway, and in doing so they had agreed to put in a trestle for us to cross safely to the beach. They also had to keep a path to the beach cleared – wide enough for a team of horses – they still honour this commitment today.

Vivian and Georgina both recall that one of the highlights of the day was meeting the 9:00 a.m. train at Ocean Park. The train stopped at Ocean Park three times a day for passengers and mail. Vivian remembers the Postmaster Rev. Hughes who took the mail from the train to the smallest post office in Canada then located at 16th and Ocean Park Road. The mail was brought up the hill by horse and sleigh. Everyone had their own mailboxes. By the time the mail had been sorted, all the people of the Ocean Park area would go to pick up their mail – it was a great meeting place – but only open until noon. One of the interests about the train arriving was who would be getting off at Ocean Park. Often it was the United Church campers.

They remember the United Church Camp and Ocean Park campers on the beach – which was much livelier than today – fires at night on the Church grounds and singing under the stars.

On the beach just in front of the trestle at Ocean Park, the Camp anchored a raft. In the summer, they stored their row boats under the trestle but during the winter months, the raft and boats were towed to Crescent Beach.

As time went by the family home was rented to St. George's on the Hill School. It was a very successful private school – but eventually closed down. Then it was rented for a time as a Lodge – it was during this period in the mid 1930s that the house burned down.

For many years the Indians from the Coqualeetza Reserve in Chilliwack would use the Stevenson property – on the waterside of Ocean Park Road, by the old house – for their summer camps.

Vivian and Georgina remember . . .

– The many crabbers when the tide was out – cooking the crabs right on the beach and cleaning them at the shore.

– Having to go through the woods from Ocean Park Road to the store at the top of the hill.

– A Scout leader and their sister, Heather swimming all the way to Crescent Beach from Ocean Park – and Vivian and Georgina following them in a row boat.

– The end of summer, with the Regattas at Crescent Beach and White Rock beaches, watched by all the campers in the South Surrey area.

– Dancing at the Blue Moon in White Rock and dancing on the porch at Taylor's Store in Crescent Beach.

Things began to change once our Father started to subdivide the land and the lots were sold. From then on Ocean Park continued to grow and grow.

Father had once remarked that "White Rock would become a city, but Ocean Park would stay as Ocean Park."

Father and Mother eventually moved out to Ocean Park once again, in the early 1950s, after we were all married. They built a smaller home on the same foundation as the original house.

As the first of the twenty-one grandchildren arrived, some of the children of Ben and Emelia Stevenson returned to Ocean Park. Now, they would come with their young families and spend the summer months on the beach, just as it had been when Georgina and Vivian were young.

At this time there are still several family members in the area, Vivian and Georgina both still live in Ocean Park – on the same property where once they had spent their summers as young people – and in the same location where they had once had summer homes. Here they spent the summers with their own children, and now, in permanent homes where their grown children, grandchildren and great grandchildren come for visits and enjoy Ocean Park – just as much as their Grandparents did.

– Georgina Strachan, Vivian Falconer

QUOTE:

"It is a poor teacher who cannot learn from his pupils."

– J. MAURICE LOWE

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