

Diverse Saanich

Early Settlement of Saanich Peninsula



*Portrait of unidentified Chinese cook
and foreman of Broadmead Farm,
taken on Chinese New Year, 1893*

Diversity has existed on the Saanich Peninsula since long before the first Europeans arrived and for nearly 200 years, immigrants from across the world have chosen to make this area their home.

At Saanich, we strive to live in harmony with one another and recognize that our differences are what make our community strong.



Evidence of First Nations settlement in the area now called Saanich dates back over 4,000 years. The District of Saanich lies within the traditional territories of the Ləkʷəŋən peoples known today as Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, and the ƵSÁNEĆ peoples known today as ƵJOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), BOKÉĆEN (Pauquachin), SƆÁUTƵ (Tsawout), ƵSIKEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations. Each group formed a distinct nation within their own territory and their historical connections with the land continue to this day.



Songhees First Nations Potlach on the site of the former reserve, west side of the Johnson Street Bridge, 1895

In 1885, the Government of Canada passed the potlatch ban, legislation forbidding the practice of the potlatch. The ban remained in Canadian legal code until 1951, when Section 149 was deleted from a revision of the *Indian Act*. Despite the potlatch ban never being entirely effective with many continuing the practice underground, it did cause significant cultural damage.



Unidentified First Nations family in Sidney, 1900

To learn more:

“Makúk: a new history of Aboriginal-white relations”,
by John Lutz

“SENĆOŦEN: WSÁNEĆ legends and stories”, by Ivan
Morris, Earl Claxton, Adelynne Claxton, Belinda Claxton,
and Saanich Native Heritage Society

“Indigenous Repatriation Handbook”, by Jisgang Nika
Collison, Sdaahl K’awaas Lucy Bell, Lou-ann Neel

“Wisdom of the Elders”, by Ruth Kirk

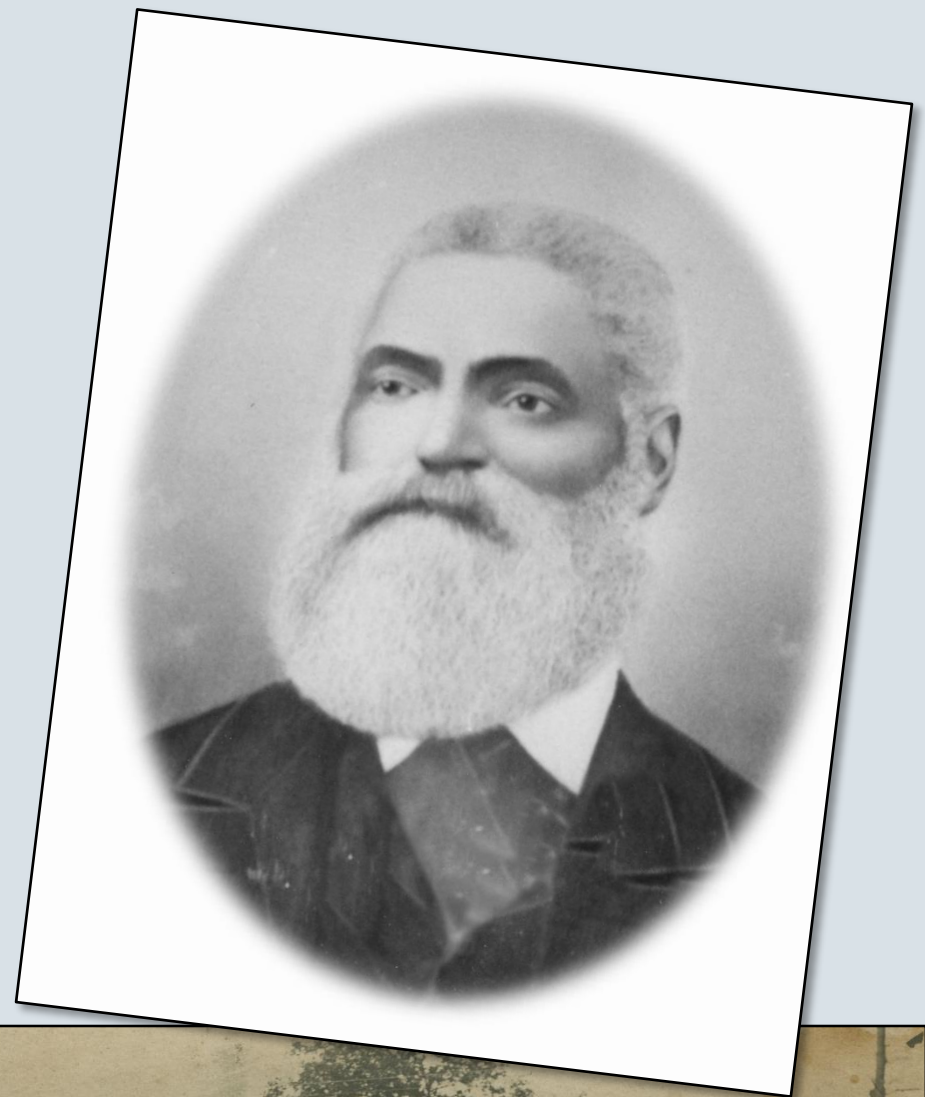


*Unidentified First Nations
woman drying seaweed, 1904*

In the infancy of British Columbia, during the time of the gold rush and amid concerns over annexation to the United States, hundreds of Black settlers accepted Governor James Douglas' invitation to immigrate to Vancouver Island. In Saanich, many of these pioneers became farmers and the community regularly came together to build churches and schools.

One family that arrived in Saanich from California during this period was Charles and Nancy Alexander and their children, arriving in 1858. After finding success in the Fraser River gold fields, Charles purchased a farm near Shady Creek in Saanich, where the family would remain for the next 33 years.

The Alexander family initiated and supported the building of the original Shady Creek Methodist Church and Charles was one of its first preachers. A carpenter by trade, Charles Alexander was also a school trustee for many years and was involved in the formation of the Temperance Society and the Agricultural Society. The family later moved to the Swan Lake area and many Alexander descendants still reside on Vancouver Island today.



Top: Portrait of Charles Alexander, date unknown

Bottom: Unidentified member of the Alexander family riding with William Richard Pridmore and Cliff Osborne at the corner of Burnside Road and Douglas Street, ca. 1914

See Endorsement
CERTIFICATE OF TITLE.

No. 10441^a

August 20 1890.

NAME OF OWNER.	ABSOLUTE FEES BOOK.	DATE OF REGISTRATION.	PARCELS—SHORT DESCRIPTION.
<u>Charles</u> <u>Alexander.</u>	Vol. 11. Fol. 671.	20 th Aug 1890 3.10 P.M.	— Lat 6 — — Lake Hill Estate — — Map 180 — — Victoria District —

LIST OF INSTRUMENTS.

Transfer See Absolute Fees Book Vol 9. Fol 165. No. 5405^a.
26th June 1890. Robert Edward Jackson to Samuel George
Smith conveyance in fee.
26th June 1890. Samuel George Smith to Charles Alexander
conveyance in fee.



B. J. Leggat

Registrar-General.

To learn more:

“Do Some Great Things: The Black Pioneers of British Columbia”,
by Crawford Killian

“Colour, Class, and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the
Mid-Nineteenth Century”, by Douglas A. Lorimer

“In the beauty of holiness: Shady Creek Church, 1895-1995”, by John McRae

Between 1849 and 1851, an estimated 4,000 French immigrants arrived in California from France, a portion of whom were encouraged to come to BC because working conditions were reported to be more favourable for gold mining than in San Francisco. Although the exact number of French immigrants who travelled through Victoria on their way to the gold fields of BC's interior is unknown, their numbers were considerable enough that in September 1858, a French language newspaper, *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle Calédonie* was launched.

Brothers Etienne and Alphonse Verdier were among these early French Immigrants and were some of the first European settlers on the Saanich Peninsula, arriving in Victoria from California in 1858. Etienne found work driving a water cart for George Stelly, another Peninsula pioneer. Two years later he owned the business, supplying water to city residents. He married Honora Kilroy, an Irish woman who had arrived on the Bride Ship, *SS Tynemouth* in 1862. Eventually, Etienne and Honora took up residence on the George Stelly farm near Alphonse who was also living there with his first wife, Anna, daughter of another Saanich Peninsula settler, Angus McPhail. Etienne and Honora's son Francis "Frank" later purchased the original George Stelly farm, renaming it Verdier Farm.

To learn more:

"Francophone Presence in Victoria, BC: 1843-1987", by L'Association Historique Francophone de Victoria



Top: Portrait of Frank Verdier (Saanich Pioneer Society, F522 #1)
Bottom: Frank Verdier's home on West Saanich road, ca. 1970s

Another group of people drawn to Vancouver Island by the Gold Rush were Jewish merchants with business connections in San Francisco. These economic migrants were at an advantage as they were already familiar with the cadence of frontier life, and had experience in the industry from their time spent in America. From their base in Victoria, these Jewish businessmen played a significant role in developing the wholesale and distribution networks which supplied Victoria and the BC interior with a wide range of consumer goods.

A smaller number of Jewish miners, traders, and shopkeepers also ventured up the Saanich Peninsula and into BC's interior, but most settled in the commercial areas of Victoria and Vancouver. Victoria's first synagogue, Temple Emanu-El, was consecrated in 1863 at which time, Victoria's permanent Jewish population reached about 250.

The decline of the gold trade in the 1870s spurred a shift in the province's Jewish demographic. Victoria's Jewish population declined and many prominent residents relocated to Vancouver. On the 1921 census, only one person in Saanich identified as Jewish.

To learn more:

"Raincoast Jews: Integration in British Columbia", by Lillooet Nordlinger McDonald

"The Rise of Jewish Life and Religion in British Columbia, 1858-1948", by C.E. Leonoff

"A Coat of Many Colours: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada", by Irving Abella

NEW ADVERTISEMENTS.

NEW DRY GOODS.

THE WELL KNOWN DRY GOODS
Store of A. HOFFMAN, corner of Yates and Government streets, is now stocked with a full assortment of the latest and best

Winter Goods,
Imported from ENGLAND, FRANCE and CALIFORNIA, direct, comprising

Silk Velvet Mantillas,
LATEST STYLE;

Cloth and Cassimere Cloaks,
Russian, Sable and Martin

Victorines, Muffs and Cuffs,
BROCHEE LONG SHAWLS, BLACK CASHMERE SHAWLS, with splendid Camel's Hair Borders,

WOOLEN SHAWLS
Of every description.

We would particularly impress upon the minds of the ladies of Victoria and Vancouver Island, that we have just opened the Richest and most Fashionable Assortment of

Silk Dresses
Ever offered in this Market, consisting of Brocade, Gros de Naple, Gros de Rine, Rich Flounee and Side Stripes, Robe and Double Skirts: a splendid selection of

Poplins, Delaines and Plaids.
Our Stock of

EMBROIDERIES
Is unsurpassed on the Pacific Coast, such as Sets of Valencienn Lace, French, Scotch and Swiss Embroidered Collars and Sleeves, and also Edgings, Insertions and Stripes. Our assortment of

Domestic & Staple Dry Goods
Is also complete, among which is the best Welch, French and Shaker FLANNEL.

Ladies' Hosiery and Gloves
Of every description.

NUBIAS, POLKAS and HOODS, BED SPREADS, SHEETINGS, CARPETS, MATTINGS and OIL CLOTHS, fine French

FAMILY BLANKETS,
10-4, 11-4 and 12-4.

We invite the public to examine our Stock, and promise to give satisfaction to the most fastidious tastes, as well with regard to quality as to economy.

We charge but a slight advance on Manufacturing Prices.

We have, in addition to the above, an elegant assortment of goods suitable for

HOLIDAY PRESENTS,
and to which we direct the particular attention of our patrons. Orders from British Columbia and Washington Territory, promptly attended to.

Im Is

British Colonist, 17 November 1860, Advertisement for Abraham Hoffman's newly opened dry goods store.

In addition to his work as a dry goods merchant, Hoffman was the first secretary of the Congregation Emmanuel.

“The Chinese immigration, which was expected, is beginning to set in. About 800 Chinamen have arrived within the last fortnight, some of them in two vessels from China direct, others from San Francisco. They have nearly all gone up to the mines.

Accounts from China say that a large immigration may be expected if the Chinese are well treated.

There are no distinctions made against them in these colonies. They have the same protection as all other persons, and in the mines, they are allowed the same rights, liberties, and privileges as all other miners, and the great bulk of the population is very glad to see them coming into the country. Fears for the result are the phantoms of a few nervous and ill-informed persons”

Quote from the Victoria correspondent
of the *London Times*, May 1860.

The protections experienced by Chinese immigrants in the 1860s did not last long, however. After Asian disfranchisement in the 1870s British Columbians changed their attitudes towards Asian immigrants from toleration to vigorous hostility.

In the decades after Confederation, British Columbia undertook a campaign to restrict immigration from Asia and to limit the activities of Chinese and Japanese Canadians.

In 1872, the BC Legislature passed the first law to disqualify Chinese from voting in provincial elections. In 1895, new legislation made qualifying to vote in the federal election dependant on the provincial voters’ list. Having been stripped of their provincial voting rights, this meant that Chinese Canadians lost the federal vote too. They did not win back their right to vote until 1947 when the federal *Chinese Immigration Act*, also known as the *Chinese Exclusion Act*, was repealed.



Portrait of unidentified Chinese cook and foreman of Broadmead Farm, taken on Chinese New Year, 1893

This is a postcard addressed to Mr. McMorran Sr. The note reads: “The dozen or so Chinese labourers were very good to us youngsters, especially at Chinese New Years’ time.”



*Unidentified Chinese labourers working the spray rig
on the Borden Orchard, ca. 1910s*

To learn more:

*“A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese
and Japanese Immigrants, 1854-1914”, by Patricia Roy*

The most distinctive feature of the Chinese community in Canada prior to WWII, was its overwhelming maleness. Traditional concerns discouraged female emigration and Canadian immigration laws reinforced this practice. This maleness contributed to white suspicions about Chinese morality and to complaints that the Chinese were not contributing to the development of BC but were sending their earnings home to wives, families, and villages.

Saanich resident Lum Young Chow arrived in Victoria in 1903 at the age of 18. He began working as a houseboy for W. Jameson of the W.A. Jameson Coffee Company. For several years he worked 14 to 16 hours a day earning \$3 a month. Eventually he saved enough money to pay for his three brothers to come to Victoria. In 1924, wishing to go into business for himself he bought land on Shelbourne Street and established a greenhouse. In 1927, he married Lee Don Gui and in 1928, their eldest son Edward Lum was born. Ed was elected mayor of Saanich in 1975, serving in that role until 1978. In the 1950s, Ed's wife Rose Lee, was the first Chinese woman to work for the Bank of Commerce.



Lum family on the porch of their Shelbourne Street home (front right) with Young Bros. greenhouses and employees (back left), July 1927



Chinese dwelling on McMorran Farm, ca. early 1900s

To learn more:

"The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-1941", by Patricia Roy

"Chinese Canadians: Voices from a Community", by Evelyn Huang

While trade relations existed between First Nations communities and white settlers (predominantly the Hudson's Bay Company) during the early days of the fur trade, by the early 1900s First Nations on Vancouver Island became increasingly marginalized, and suffered the effects of racism as waves of settlers descended on the once quiet outpost. Colonial goals of economic progress and commercial development pushed First Nations groups aside with dire consequences. Although trade with First Nations was not totally abandoned, there reportedly remained a mere 30 individuals around Victoria who regularly engaged in business transactions. Of those 30 "Indian Traders" two thirds are reported to have actually been Jewish, not Indigenous.

Excluded from Victoria's merchant classes, removed from their land and denied sovereignty, many First Nations people during this period joined Chinese and Japanese immigrants as low-paid farm labourers for Europeans land owners.

Photos like these offer us only a glimpse into the lives of First Nations, Chinese, and Japanese labourers during this period and only from the perspective of the white settlers who took the photographs. It wasn't important to landowners to write-down the names of their workers and so they remain anonymous.



Geoffrey Vantreight with unidentified First Nations and Chinese strawberry pickers on the Vantreight Farm in Gordon Head, 1910



*Top: Unidentified First Nations strawberry pickers on the Vantreight Farm in Gordon Head, 1906
Middle: Unidentified First Nations strawberry pickers on the Vantreight Farm in Gordon Head, 1910
Bottom: "Berry Pickers Camp", Gordon Head (probably Vantreight Farm), 1910*



*Agnes Deans Cameron with an unidentified
First Nations family, 1908*

To learn more:

*“Songhees Pictorial: A History of the Songhees People as
seen by Outsiders, 1790-1912”*, by Grant Keddie

*“Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers
in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities”*, by Penelope Edmunds

Between 1906 and 1910, a large Sikh community developed at the Butchart Cement Plant at Tod inlet.

The workers at the cement plant and limestone quarry, consisting primarily of Sikh and Chinese immigrants, typically worked a 10 hour day, 6 days a week. If a ship arrived at the company wharf at night, Sikh workers were expected to unload even if they had already put in a 12 hour shift. If anyone refused to unload at night, they would not get additional shift work or overtime.

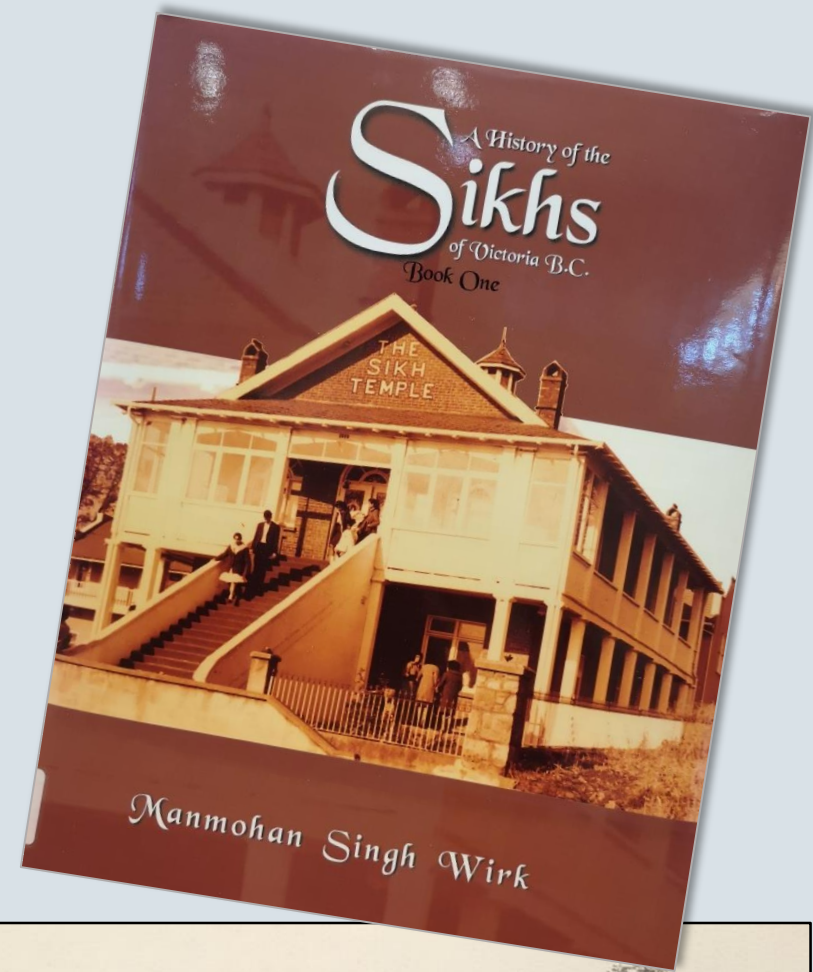
Sikh men in the community worked together to support each other. They would take turns walking to the Prospect Lake Store to buy groceries, and to nearby farms to buy chickens and eggs. A committee arranged the finances for purchase of food and supplies and each man's share was calculated at the end of the month.

Despite the supportive community, cramped communal living conditions lead to the spread of TB and other communicable diseases. In addition, the constant dust from coal and cement throughout the factory led to illnesses such as silicosis. By 1915, when the quarry ceased production, most Sikh workers had left Tod Inlet, and in 1921, the plant officially closed.

To learn more:

"A History of the Sikhs of Victoria, B.C.",
by Manmohan Singh Wirk

"The story of Butchart Gardens", by Dave Preston



Butchart Cement Plant, 1904

By 1890, Queen Victoria's birthday had become a major event in Victoria. The most popular event of the annual May festivities was the Queen's Birthday Regatta on the Gorge.

First Nations crews made their own unique contribution to the regattas, beginning in 1870. They raced against one another in long war canoes and shorter dugout canoes. As many as nine canoes entered a single race, paddling the full course in about 15 minutes. Prizes for the successful crews usually ranged from 2 to 8 dollars per paddle.

Most competitors came from reserves in the Victoria area including Sooke, Saanich Peninsula, and the Cowichan Valley. Visiting First Nations crews camped along the shore of the old Songhees Reserve in what is now Vic West, and spent part of their time attending potlatches and sunrise ceremonies.



First Nations canoe race on the Gorge, 24 May 1932

To learn more:

“The Gorge of Summers Gone: a History of Victoria's Inland Waterway”, by Dennis Minaker

The first known Japanese immigrant in Canada, Manzo Nagano, arrived in Victoria in 1877. He ran a number of businesses in downtown Victoria, catering primarily to prospectors, until his death in 1924. Like the Chinese, most Japanese immigrants to Canada between 1877 and 1907 were young men. The *Issei* (first generation) were usually literate and most came from fishing or farming villages.

In 1907, amid pervasive racism and Asian disfranchisement laws, two other Japanese immigrants, brothers Hayato and Kensuke Takata, created Canada's first Japanese garden and teahouse in what is now Esquimalt's Gorge Park. At its peak, the garden and teahouse attracted thousands of visitors and became a vibrant social hub that enriched the lives of residents of all backgrounds.

When Hayato and Kensuke Takata were forcibly uprooted and sent to internment camps in 1942 along with nearly 22,000 other Japanese Canadians, local residents looted and destroyed the once-treasured site. It took 35 years to nurture the tea gardens and mere months to destroy what the brothers had built, an act of racism that severed the Takatas' last tie to their adopted city. After the war, they moved to Toronto to start over.

The Takata Japanese Garden/Zen Garden at the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific in Saanich is named for the Takata family and features two Japanese maples that were saved from the Gorge Park gardens.



Japanese Tea Garden, ca. 1910s

From 1914 until 1938, Jenkichi Nishimoto and his wife, Shimoko grew vegetables and strawberries on the land they leased from the Roland Family at what is now 3080 Albina Street. Trained as a shipwright in Japan, Nishimoto built a sampan (flat-bottomed, covered, wooden boat), which he launched in the Gorge in 1908 to provide popular sight-seeing tours along the waterway.



From the 1920s until 1942, Rinzo Ono operated the Tillicum Dairy with his wife Tora and two daughters on land they leased from the Roland Family at what is now 3157 Tillicum Road.

The Nishimoto and Ono families were among the 22,000 Japanese Canadians forcibly removed from their homes and sent to internment camps in the interior in 1942. After their expulsion from Victoria, their land and homes were leased to a white farmer named McKay. They were not able to profit from the sale of their home or business and had no home to return to after the war.



To learn more:

“Gateway to Promise: Canada’s first Japanese Community”, by Ann-Lee Switzer

Top: Sampan boat and teahouse at the Japanese Tea Garden, ca. 1910s

Bottom: Aya and Toyo Ono in front of their house, 3157 Tillicum Road, 1940

The forgotten history of the Japanese teahouse and gardens sits alongside the erasure of an even older history of Gorge Park. The Gorge and Portage Inlet were the site of oyster harvesting and salmon and herring fishing by the Songhees and Esquimalt people stretching back thousands of years.

The story of the site under Tillicum Bridge, as told by Songhees elder Jimmy Fraser to anthropologist Wilson Duff in the 1950s, relates that the Transformer, Haals, saw a girl crying beside her grandfather at the narrows in the Gorge because

she was hungry. After asking her about what she liked to eat, Haals stocked the inlet with her favourite foods and then turned the two into large boulders, creating the rapid and reversing falls. Embedded in those people-turned-to-stone was some of the Transformer's power so, teens entering puberty would dive into the rapids and swim down to touch this girl named Camosun, absorbing some of that power, showing their bravery, and preparing themselves for the journey to adulthood.

The stones of Camosun and her grandfather protected the resources of the Gorge because they made it impossible for pleasure and commercial fishing craft of immigrants to pass beyond the narrows. That protection lasted until June 1960, when Robert Southwell, proprietor of the Gorge Boathouse, dynamited the rocks to allow passage.

To learn more:

"The Indian History of British Columbia: The Impact of the White Man", by Wilson Duff



Top: Early Log Bridge over the Gorge, looking west, ca. 1848-1869

Bottom: Statue of Camosun by Frank Dobbs located in Gorge Waterway Park



In order to improve the diversity of our archival collection and our ability to tell diverse stories, Saanich Archives encourage donations of historical material from members of underrepresented communities.

We are also looking for people to share their stories of life in Saanich as part of our oral history project.

If you or someone you know has material or stories to share, contact us at:

archives@saanich.ca | 250-475-5494 ext. 3478

