

A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH — by HELEN A. MITCHELL

Upper Islander women's reporter writes Campbell River history

The History of Campbell River that I have written is finally in print. "DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH" is now being distributed for sale in local places of business.

"Write a column about your book", says the editor, "Tell why you wrote it and how you wrote it".

Well, here goes.

Work on the history was started in August 1963. The book was finished in January of this year—the product of a little blood, a lot of sweat, and a great many tears. I had never tackled a writing job as formidable as this history of Campbell River and, at this writing, I'm wondering if I ever will again. I see that the synonyms for "formidable" include "appalling, tremendous, arduous". That's how it appeared to me.

Apart from a few articles written about this District, there was no record of those who carved this flourishing town from the wilderness, nor the great men who foresaw the future possibilities of this place, nor of the little people who lived and worked here and contributed in their own way to its development.

A lot of the pioneers were passing away and taking with them first-hand accounts of the early days in Campbell River and I felt it was high time that someone started recording their recollections and combining them with what documents and records were available, into a readable book.

During my earlier years of reporting the news of the District for a number of newspapers I had gathered a small amount of information about Campbell River. I began to add to this information gradually, and what started out as an interesting hobby soon became a full-time job.

I made many trips to Vancouver, Victoria and Courtenay, doing research, as well as visits to dozens of people and places of business. I wrote hundreds of letters and advertised in newspapers, seeking information. In all but one or two cases, I received whole-hearted co-operation from those I approached.

Each trip I made to Victoria took four days, during which time I spent most of the hours from 9 to 5 buried in the lower floors of the Parliament Buildings, poring over old newspapers on the Provincial Library shelves for mention of Campbell River, or in the Archives, reading old directories, surveyor's reports, marine and lumbering histories, diaries, old documents of any and every description, for any item of information pertaining to the District or to the people who lived here.

I can't begin to say how grateful I am to Willard E. Ireland, Provincial Librarian and Archivist, or to Miss Inez Mitchell, Assistant Archivist, and their staff, for the help they gave me. They offered many useful suggestions, hunted up obscure information for me, and showed me how to conduct my research in a more orderly manner.

I found the visits to local old-timers, and the letters received from those who had moved away but who were still interested in the district, the most interesting and rewarding.

Many an hour was spent chatting to the early residents about the old days and the old ways, while I jotted down their recollections and tried to see Campbell River as they saw it. Many an evening was spent with Mr. and Mrs. Carl O. Thulin, gathering information about the town in its infancy. A large proportion of the photos in the book are from Mr. Thulin's excellent collection of mementos of bygone days.

Finally the book was finished—if a history can ever really be finished.

"DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH" is now presented to the public as a tribute to the Pioneers and the Progress they have made in little more than sixty years.

In Campbell River, the Pioneers found a diamond in the rough and saw its future possibilities. The Progress is symbolized in the way its many facets are being polished and brought to a brilliance that we hope will last and last.



AUTHOR of History of Campbell River, Mrs. Helen Mitchell is pictured here with Brother Charles A. E. Brandt of the Hermits of St. John the Baptist near Merville, B.C. Brother Charles produced the binding cover on Mrs. Mitchell's book — A Diamond in the Rough. Brother Charles specializes in book restoration and art binding. The colony of hermits had its origin in Martinique and after various moves founded their colony on Vancouver Island.