

# Newsletter



*Photos: Sea Island Heritage Society*

## WHAT'S NEW

### OUR MILITARY HERITAGE

Learn about four young Richmond men who made the ultimate sacrifice in WWII and the four memorial roads named for them in Cora Brown, now renamed on Lulu Island.

### LIFE STORIES OF SEA ISLANDERS

Read about Sea Island Nikkei fisherman Toshi Koyanagi and the Iona - a fish packer boat.

### SEA ISLAND REUNION 2022

In preparation for our first Sea Island Reunion, May 28, 2022, we are forming a committee now and welcome volunteers to help us plan.

Please contact Eunice Robinson at [eunice@genbug.ca](mailto:eunice@genbug.ca).

## President's Message

*"A life not documented is a life that within a generation or two will largely be lost to memory."*

We'd like to thank those of you who contacted us about our September Newsletter and how much you appreciated learning about the Cannery community. Hope you enjoy the continuation in this issue.

Though Remembrance Day was on November 11th, we're honouring four young men who gave their lives in the service of their country during World War II. Read the article about the Cora Brown Memorial Roads. You may have visited our Facebook page to see the postings about some of our fathers who served in World War II. We continue to gather information on those veterans, and hope you will be interested in sharing your parents' stories with us.

Our Membership Drive continues. Christmas is coming! What do you get a person who doesn't need another pair of socks? Perhaps consider a membership in the Sea Island Heritage Society. It is only \$10.00 per person, and the funds raised go towards our continuing research.

SIHS is looking for a few volunteers. If you are an interested and avid Facebook user, we are looking for someone to 'mind' our Facebook page. We are also looking for a couple of typists. If these are of interest, please contact us at [seaislandbc@gmail.com](mailto:seaislandbc@gmail.com).

The inspirational phrase above reminds us of how important it is to preserve the past and our memories. The Sea Island Heritage Society continues to collect these memories and photographs. We invite you to share your stories, memories and photos with us.

Let's stay connected - check out our website <https://seaislandhome.org> and Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/seaislandheritagesociety>.

In the meantime, stay healthy, and have a Safe & Merry Christmas.

*Eunice Robinson*



President

Sea Island Heritage Society



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Zoom Coffee Chat** - We will hold Coffee Chats every third Thursday from 10 am to noon starting on January 20, 2022. Send us a request at [seaisland20@gmail.com](mailto:seaisland20@gmail.com) to get the Zoom link.

**Sea Island Reunion** - Covid-19 permitting, the Society will be holding its first Sea Island reunion on May 28, 2022 in Richmond, British Columbia. Details will be posted to our website, Facebook page and following newsletters.

## CORA BROWN MEMORIAL ROADS

After WWII, the *Veterans Land Act of Canada* (VLA) provided the funds and oversight to build the subdivision of Cora Brown on Sea Island for veterans and their families. Families started moving into their new homes in 1946 (see <https://seaislandhome.org/corabrown.html>). Isolated on the northwest shore of Sea Island, Cora Brown residents formed strong bonds in their support for each other, the fathers grounded in the sacrifice they made for our country. The streets were few, but their names significant. ABERCROMBIE, EDGINGTON, McCUTCHEON, and MYRON were four young men from Richmond who lost their lives in WWII.



### Private Jack ABERCROMBIE

Jack was born in 1925, a native son of Richmond. He graduated from Richmond High School and then was employed by Boeing Aircraft on Sea Island. In his spare time, Jack loved to skate on Grauer's frozen fields in the wintertime. He was enlisted in 1944 and trained in Halifax before going overseas. Jack was stationed temporarily in England, then sent to France on September 1st, 1944. He was fatally wounded in France on September 8th, 1944.



### Private Ernie EDGINGTON

Ernie was born in 1923 in Rutland B.C. and attended Richmond High School during the 1930s while living with his parents in Richmond. He enlisted in 1941, was posted to the Irish Fusiliers and trained for over a year before being sent to England in June 1942. He wrote home often, a caring son concerned about his parents' health and the amount of farm work left to them since so many family members, including three of his brothers, were overseas. On July 13, 1943 his unit was sent to Italy. He was killed in action December 11, 1943 and is buried in Italy.



### Lieutenant Elvie McCUTCHEON

Elvie was born in 1914 in Saskatchewan and moved to Richmond in 1922 with his mother and brother to live at the farm of his grandfather. He attended Bridgeport Elementary and Richmond High School, leaving in 1929. He farmed, was a sports writer for the Marpole Richmond Review, and played lacrosse as well as a number of other sports before enlisting in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1941. He embarked for England in 1943. His niece, Marney Ellis, shares that on the night he died, McCutcheon was piloting a military bomber when it was shot down at 9:45 p.m., a crash near the town of Bokensdorf that also claimed two others. On January 16, 1945, his squadron was engaged in night operations against Germany when his aircraft was shot down. Elvie and three others died instantly. He is buried in Germany.



### Pilot Officer Air Gunner Ian MYRON

Ian was born in 1925 in Saskatchewan, and moved to Richmond in 1937 with his parents. In high school, Ian delivered The Province newspaper on Sea Island. Ian attended Richmond High School until 1942, when he joined a printing business. While waiting to enlist, he served with the Seaforth Cadets and the 39th Field Royal Canadian Army in Vancouver. He enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force and trained as an air gunner in Alberta and Quebec before leaving for England in 1944. Ian received a promotion to Pilot Officer Air Gunner just before the #426, a Halifax #LW200 he was in collided with a Lancaster bomber from #426 Squadron killing all aboard. Ian is buried in Surrey, England.

These men made the ultimate sacrifice, and, while the streets of Cora Brown are no longer, their names live on. In the mid-80s, three streets on Lulu Island were renamed: Abercrombie Drive, McCutcheon Place and Myron Court. Members of the Sea Island Heritage Society realized Edgington was missing and voiced their concern. A street on Lulu Island, Edgington Avenue, now bears his name.



In 2016, the City of Richmond agreed to add a poppy emblem to streets named for Richmond citizens who died in military service. McCutcheon Place is an example of signage honouring Richmond veterans.

Visiting Edgington Avenue in October 2021, we noticed that it does not have a poppy. We have contacted the City of Richmond to bring this to their attention.

### Sources

1. City of Richmond Archives Photos for the portraits of Jack ABERCROMBIE, Ernie EDGINGTON, Elvie McCUTCHEON, and Ian MYRON.
2. Mary Keen's book, *We Will Remember Them*, 1998, City of Richmond Archives
3. Marney Ellis shares story of her uncle, Elvie McCUTCHEON, a WWII pilot. Richmond Review Nov 7 2009
4. Sea Island Heritage Society webpage, <https://seaislandhome.org/corabrown.html>.
5. Road signage photos courtesy of Marilyn Low.

## TOSHITSUGU (TOSHI) KOYANAGI AND THE IONA

*The Sea Island Heritage Society (SIHS) continues to document and share family stories from the Cannery Community that lived on Sea Island. Here, we focus on Toshitsugu (Toshi) Koyanagi and his experiences before, during and after WWII, including his time with the Iona, a fish collector boat.*

Toshi was born on Sea Island on August 29, 1911. His parents and older brother came to Sea Island, Richmond, BC from Japan in 1898. Toshi's birth certificate identifies Eburne as his place of birth. Eburne was one of the earliest communities on Sea Island with a general store and post office (<https://www.seaislandhome.org/eburne.html>). At the time of Toshi's birth, there were a large group of Japanese-Canadian families living on the southwest corner of Sea Island where the Acme Cannery (1909 - 1918) and Vancouver Cannery (1896 - 1930) were located. Toshi lived with his father, mother and brother and other siblings in one of the huts built on the side of the dyke, alongside other Japanese Canadian families. It was a happy community, where Japanese Canadians shared a common lifestyle living off the fishing industry. Most fished or worked at the canneries and cork mill, while others were boat builders, fish collectors or worked on the nearby farms, necessary work to support the fishermen and their families. They viewed each other as equals.



*Acme Cannery (top) and Vancouver Cannery (bottom) on southwest corner of Sea Island ca. 1932.  
City of Richmond Archives Photograph 1985 166 10.*

**Early Years.** Toshi spent his early years playing with other children who lived at the canneries and nearby farmlands on the southwest side of Sea Island. He attended the Japanese language school located at the Vancouver Cannery. Possibly, he enjoyed playing with others on the sandbar in the summer when the tide went out, heeding a warning from his parents to be careful around the water. Several drownings occurring in the past served as painful reminders of what could happen to those living so close to the river's edge.

While he spent most of his time with other Japanese Canadian children and their families, he also played with others who lived at or near the canneries. One of his friends was Bernice Montgomery (nee Goulding) whose father, Thomas Goulding, Esq. owned and operated the Cork Mill that sat between the two canneries on the dyke. Bernice and Toshi shared many daily childhood experiences living in the southwest corner of Sea Island and, through those experiences, developed a lasting friendship. Bernice later left Sea Island, married, and had a daughter, Doreen (born 1932). Bernice and Doreen moved back to the house Thomas Goulding built on Shannon

Road so that Bernice could care for her mother, sick with cancer. Bernice divorced and married William Montgomery—Doreen's 'Pa.' Doreen remembers her family's friendship with Toshi, as she recently shared fond memories of that time.

**A Fish Collector.** As a young man, Toshi was involved in the fishing industry as a collector. Some collector boats were wooden double-enders. One of those boats used at the Sea Island canneries



*The Iona arrives at Britannia Shipyards by former shipwright Jack Weinrauch (1994). Photo courtesy of Doreen Braverman.*

was the Iona, built in the 1930s. It was a double-ender where the bow and stern both came to a point. Daily, collectors left the canneries in boats like the Iona to collect fish from smaller fishing boats at the mouth of the Fraser or farther out at sea. The collectors would pack the fish on ice and transport the catch to the canneries. In this way, the fishing boats could fish for longer periods of time during the short fishing season. Toshi

worked as a collector for Nelson Brothers. While most of the canneries on

Sea Island had closed by 1935, the work of fish collecting continued. Toshi continued with his work as a fish packer.

**Evacuation and Internment.** In December 1941, work in the fishing industry came to an end for Japanese Canadians in Canada with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The Canadian Government of the time viewed the coastal communities of Japanese Canadians as enemies of the state and invoked an order to forcibly relocate and intern them in the name of national security. The majority of those evacuated were Canadians by birth. Many in BC were sent to the interior of BC or Alberta, their property confiscated, including fish boats, and, in the case of those on Sea Island, their homes on the dyke were razed. The final day of evacuation was March 31, 1942. Toshi was 30 years old when he was sent to New Denver, the only belongings he could take were what he could carry.



*The burning of Japanese Canadian houses at Acme Cannery. City of Richmond Archives Photograph 2000 15 2*

If there was a happy moment in this turn of events, Toshi met and married Shuzuko (Shuz) Yamada in New Denver, British Columbia. Toshi was an orderly at a Sanitarium and Shuz was a nurse's aid at the Sanitarium. The marriage took place on April 15, 1944 at the New Denver Full Gospel Mission with Clergyman Karl Hansen officiating. That same year while in New Denver, they had a son, Leonard Koyanagi. Through those years, resilience and resistance kept the Japanese community strong. Doreen's grandfather, Thomas Goulding, would visit Toshi, Shuz and Leonard in the Interior where they were interned (1942-1949). He often took his granddaughter, Doreen, with him. Doreen and Leonard continue that family friendship to this day.



*Toshi Koyanagi and Shuzuko Yamada 1944, City of Richmond Archives 2000 15 7*

**A Return to Sea Island.** The restrictions imposed under the *War Measures Act* were lifted March 31, 1949. Toshi and his family returned to Sea Island in 1950 and lived at 376 Shannon Road. Soon after returning, Toshi was reunited with the Iona thanks to William Montgomery, Doreen's Pa who had purchased the Iona from Crown Assets when the confiscated properties were put up for sale. Toshi was grateful to be working the Iona again and continued with his work as a fish collector with Nelson Brothers for at least another decade. In 1960, the Iona had its aft deck redesigned to allow for a larger fish hold. It was no longer a double-ender.

**Steveston, B.C.** Toshi moved his family to Steveston in 1955. He died December 1, 1974. Toshi's son, Leonard Koyanagi sold the Iona to the City of Richmond (Britannia Steering Committee) on October 18, 1991. Family friend, Doreen Braverman, supported Leonard's efforts to have the Iona returned to its former state. While some restoration has taken place, the many years the wooden boat spent in the water created the need for costly repairs. The Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site proudly displays a well-travelled Iona in dry dock with the hopes of someday continuing with its restoration.



*Photo by Marilyn Low - October 2021*

## Acknowledgements and References

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1. We are grateful for the opportunity to talk with Toshi's son, Leonard Koyanagi, as he shared more of the details of his father's life, and we have included them here.
2. We are also grateful for opportunity to learn from Doreen Braverman as she recalled many happy memories of the Koyanagi family, some of which are documented in her book, *1169L1*, now available for a \$10 donation to SIHS (contact [seaislandbc@gmail.com](mailto:seaislandbc@gmail.com)).
3. View the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society's Tides to Tins website at <https://tidestotins.ca> to learn about canneries on Sea Island.
4. Read *Japanese Canadians on Sea Island* presented by Friends of the Richmond Archives, <https://richmondarchives.ca/2015/01/06/japanese-canadians-on-sea-island>.
5. Visit the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site to view the Iona, located at 5180 Westwater Drive, Richmond, B.C.
6. Read *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet: BC's Japanese Canadian Fishermen* by Masako Fukawa with Stanley Fukawa and the Nikkei Fishermen's History Book Committee for a full historical perspective "of ordinary people who faced inequity, prejudice and inhumanity with an indomitable spirit" (p.9).
7. See Maritime Vessel Management Report to the City of Richmond that includes information about the Iona and its sale to the Britannia Shipyards National Historical Site [https://www.richmond.ca/shared/assets/3\\_Maritime\\_Vessel\\_Management45894.pdf](https://www.richmond.ca/shared/assets/3_Maritime_Vessel_Management45894.pdf).
8. View the Sea Island Heritage Society's website at <https://seaislandhome.org> to read about cannery life, especially of those of Japanese descent.

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## NEWS FROM BURKEVILLE

In October 2021, the Richmond Museum launched its Self-Guided History Walking Tour titled "*Sea Island: The Aviation Story*". You can download the PDF to your phone or print a copy (<http://www.richmondmuseum.ca/explore/publications>) and take a tour of the Burkeville and surrounding area with a rich aviation history.

## TIMELINE OF HISTORICAL EVENTS (CONTINUED FROM SEPT 2021 NEWSLETTER)

Some events listed are from Leonard Ham's (1987) *An Archaeological Heritage Resource Overview of Richmond, B.C.*, Tides to Tins at <http://tidestotins.ca/timeline>, Mary Keen's (2002) *A Bridge to the World: The Life and Times of Sea Island*, and our Sea Island pioneers research.

**pre-1800** - Coastal Indigenous people were fishing and hunting on Sea Island, perhaps trapping beaver for Hudson's Bay Company (no written record exists).

**1792 - late 1850s** - Europeans explore Fraser River delta.

**1859** - John TRUTCH surveys most of Sea and Lulu Islands.

**1861** - First non-native settler on Sea Island, Hugh McROBERTS, names his farm "Richmond View" after their home in Australia. McROBERTS has first harvest of wheat on Sea Island.

**1866** - Early settlement on Sea Island by Hugh BOYD and Alexander KILGOUR.

**1867** - Sam and Fitzgerald McCLEERY, nephews of McROBERTS, purchased land on Sea Island, but lived on the north side of the Fraser River across from Sea Island.

**1869** - Howard, Warren and Ward DeBECK bought 1200 acres on Sea Island from McROBERTS and Howard later purchased the remaining McROBERTS farm.

**1871** - John BROUGH purchased part of a small island adjacent to Sea Island and was known as Brough Island. He already owned 210 acres on Sea Island.

**1875** - Duncan and Hugh McDONALD (Scottish) purchased land on Sea Island to farm. William NICOLL bought property on Sea Island and was a Richmond Councillor and school trustee, overseeing the building of Sea Island Elementary School.

**1879** - Richmond is incorporated.

**1880** - First Municipal Election held on Sea Island at the home of Hugh BOYD.

**1881** - Angus Carmichael FRASER bought farmland on Sea Island from the McCLEERY brothers.

**1885** - John DINSMORE purchased Brough Island and renamed it Dinsmore Island.

## SEA ISLAND PIONEER FAMILY: JOHN DINSMORE

John DINSMORE (1847-1935) and his wife Mary Ann Elizabeth RAYSON (1860-1935) came from Ontario in 1885 with their two children, Alban (1883-1970) and Mary Maud (1884-1964). They settled on Brough Island, an island on the middle arm of the Fraser on the east side of Sea Island. John BROUGH had bought part of the island in the 1870s, built a small house and farmed there, but did not dyke or drain the land. When the DINSMORE family bought the property in 1885, it was renamed Dinsmore Island.



*John and Mary Dinsmore with family. Source: SIHS Collection*

John built a home and enclosed the garden with a dyke. The family took their vegetables and dairy products to market each week by rowing to New Westminster, a distance of about 14 miles. The 1891 Canadian Census lists John DINSMORE as living on Dinsmore Island with his wife Mary and their children Alban and Mary. His stated occupation is Farmer. John and Mary soon had two more children, both born on Dinsmore Island in the community of Eburne, Sea Island: Violet Jane (1895-1905) and Garnet Ervine (1897-1957).

The Goodmurphy Cannery opened on Dinsmore Island in 1894. The following year, it was incorporated as the Dinsmore Cannery, owned and operated by John DINSMORE, M.B. WILKINSON, W.D GOODMURPHY and Caleb GOODMURPHY. B. C. Packers acquired the cannery in the early 1900s. The plant was demolished in 1913.

In 1899, after living fourteen years on the island, John sold the property as his older children wanted a higher education. John's half-brother James DINSMORE lived in Vancouver. According to the 1901 Census, John, Mary, and their children moved to 611 Cordova Street in Vancouver. Maud was married at the family home in 1900. Their daughter Violet, 10 years of age, died from tubular meningitis at the family home listed as 627 Cordova Street. A year later, John and Mary's daughter, Pearl (1906-1973), was born.

The DINSMORE'S moved again, this time to 2025 West 11th Avenue. The house was eventually moved to an unknown location in Vancouver. In 1933, the Bessborough Armoury was built on that property.



John, Mary, and Violet DINSMORE are buried at the Mountain View Cemetery in Vancouver.

The Vancouver Airport eventually purchased Dinsmore Island. In 1952, the island became part of Sea Island by means of infill. Today, a bridge from Sea Island to Lulu Island bears John DINSMORE'S name.

**Sources:** John Dinsmore Obituary; Wikipedia; 1891, 1901 & 1911 Canadian Census Records; BC Death Index; Canada Find a Grave; Ontario Marriage Index; City of Richmond Archives; Vancouver Gunners; SIHS Dinsmore Collection, SIHS Collection.

## LIST OF BENEFACTORS

The SIHS would like to thank everyone who became a member or provided us with donations. This financial support helps us to continue documenting the life of Sea Islanders and preserve the history of Sea Island. Our main fundraising activity is usually a combination membership and yearly calendar. With Covid-19, we have been unable to produce our yearly calendars, but we still rely on memberships and donations to continue our work.

We also receive many donations of memorabilia. Since September 2021, the following were given to the Sea Island Heritage Society:

- **Emily Fleming** - photos of a small time capsule dated 1951 from Dianne Williams found in the old floors of 340 Douglas Crescent, Burkeville, and a 2021 photo of the house on Douglas.
- **Trevor Marc Hughes** - a link to "The Young Hustler", a short documentary film based on Jack Hughes (Trevor's grandfather)'s memoirs of his operation of tugboats along the North Arm of the Fraser River during the Great Depression years.
- **Dorothy McCord** - historical letter written by Ernest Cooney to Mrs. McCord's grandmother, Maggie (Gordon) Wallace in Grand Valley, Ontario in 1922.
- **Chris and Jeff Parker** - photos of Jeff's artwork: a painting of the old corner store in Burkeville entitled 'West of Donegani's (1989) and a pen and ink of the three doors that led off from the kitchen in their Burkeville home (1978).
- **Eunice Robinson** - photos from the Jim Hamalock Collection.

## AGM 2021



## CONTACT US

If you have questions, comments, or want to share your memories and photos, we would love to hear from you.

The membership fee for 2022 is \$10 per person.

To submit a letter, documents, photos, or a cheque for your membership via snail mail:

**Sea Island Heritage Society**

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To pay your membership by e-Transfer: [seaisland20@gmail.com](mailto:seaisland20@gmail.com)

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