

KAREN'S CORNER



Every space here holds its own legends—a tapestry of family gatherings, shared laughter, and bonds formed through overcoming hardships together. These narratives intertwine, creating a unique sense of community that makes Eagle Bay truly special. I invite you to share your stories with me! Let us celebrate the moments, memories, and experiences that make our community so remarkable. Together, we can continue to embrace the spirit of this wonderful place we proudly call home.

Harvesting Wisdom: What Eagle Bay's Early Farmers Taught Us

Long before Eagle Bay became known for its sparkling waters and picture-postcard scenery, it was a place where hope and hardship went hand in hand. At the turn of the 20th century, dreams of fertile fields and thriving farms lured settlers to this rugged land. At the heart of their struggle and perseverance stood the Farmers' Institute (FI). This progressive organization took root in the Shuswap region in the 1900s. It brought together neighbours with a shared vision for a better life, addressed farming challenges, and improved community services. Their story lives on in the handwritten minutes, found decades later in a dusty attic and painstakingly preserved by Renee Hester in binders at Eagle Bay Hall. These records, spanning from 1915 to 1964, reveal the hard-won wisdom the early settlers gathered along the way. They demonstrate the determination and humour of the homesteaders who built Eagle Bay.



Whitehead Farm in the early 1900s. Retrieved from the Eagle Bay Hall.



As you leaf through these notes, the romance of the “good old days” fades quickly. Pioneers worked hard to establish a livelihood amid disappointment, as Eagle Bay's farmland proved less fertile than promised. Today, old fruit trees remain as quiet testaments to past farming ambitions.

Eagle Bay's changing landscape with remnants of apple trees from past farming days.

These records invite anyone curious to hear the voices that shaped the community. What did Eagle Bay's early settlers learn as they built a community from the ground up? What lessons do their experiences still offer us today?

The FI's purpose was clear. They gathered neighbours and amplified voices for shared progress. Meetings covered issues related to roads, schools, and social needs. Their unity stands out. With this spirit of teamwork firmly established, the community was ready to tackle whatever came next, setting the stage for the decades ahead.

The first obstacle the settlers faced was a wharf, a crucial gateway for supplies. Waterways were the main form of transportation of the day. For those early residents, reliable mail service became just as essential—a lifeline connecting them to the outside world. Beyond personal correspondence, a functional postal system helped solidify a cohesive nation across Canada's vast landscape.

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The minutes reveal how critical mail service was and how adversity, such as unreliable mail delivery, drove a collective response among residents in Eagle Bay. For instance, on October 9, 1915, the FI joined with Celesta to improve boat service. Mr. Readman was appointed to bring in mail once a week from Blind Bay at \$8.00 a trip. Additionally, \$6.40 was given to Lockhart Smith to make two mail trips to Notch Hill when regular mail service was suspended due to frozen water in the winter. These were vast sums of money for this time period.

Mail service was the key lifeline in this rugged region, arriving by rail to Notch Hill and then by barge from Blind Bay to Eagle Bay. But as the years passed and technology advanced, the community's focus shifted yet again—from water routes to the daunting task of road construction.



The Blind Bay Post Office is more than 100 years old today.

Road construction in the 1920s focused on upgrading old wagon trails into more passable routes, often using labour-intensive methods with some newly steam-powered machinery. In Eagle Bay, this development was completed in fits and starts. In 1930, records note that although road construction began in 1922, it halted for several years. Prominent in the records are comments related to developing a trail wide enough for a horse and sleigh to connect Blind Bay and Eagle Bay to Wildrose Bay. Throughout this era, government lobbying continued and is reflected in every record from these years.

Persistence was the name of the game. Whether by water or rutted road, transportation setbacks seemed to be a local pastime. And, honestly, some things never change. With \$7.00 a year in land tax, a king's ransom in those days, many settlers paid with sweat equity instead of cash—through challenging terrain, they rolled up their sleeves to clear brush, dynamite to clear rocks, and smooth out gravel trails, relying heavily on picks and shovels.

By the early 1940s, the roads in Eagle Bay had grown beyond dusty gravel—they were essential lifelines, connecting families and fueling progress. As road construction improved, maintenance and upgrades remained an issue. Minutes from 1941 reflect this: "Thanks for the road work, all tax money used—gravel needed." The following year, in 1942, the request became even clearer: "A power snow plow on our road when needed would be welcome." Throughout the 1940s, Eagle Bay continued to press for help, showing polite persistence even as needs grew.

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Of course, roads and infrastructure were only part of the story—hard times called for extra compassion and ingenuity. The FI collected boots, shared extra coats, and made sure every family had shelter and a warm meal. Nothing went to waste, and everyone was cared for. In Eagle Bay, kindness was simply a way of life.

The minutes from those years are more than a record of chores—they're a testament to character. Those old meeting minutes are full of stories you don't hear much these days: gentle democracy and good old-fashioned neighbourliness. Meeting minutes reveal a level of politeness that many board cultures today could learn from. Even in 1942, in the midst of WWII, with plenty to worry about, members stopped to note, "A fine spirit of unanimity prevailed throughout the meeting. Most members were prompt in paying their dues." Pride, trust, and the belief that every voice mattered were baked right in. Respect and gratitude weren't just for big things—they sweetened the everyday. The records make it clear that no meeting could wrap up without a nod to "the excellent cake so graciously served by Mrs. Russell." Maybe that's the real secret to a strong community: never underestimate the power of dessert.

As the decades rolled on and the goals of the 1930s and 1940s were gradually met, Eagle Bay set its sights on new horizons. New priorities emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. Once transportation needs were addressed, attention shifted to telephone and electricity services. Even though residents paid for these utilities, petitions were required to complete the process.

With better connections and more families settling by the lake, the community's focus turned to the environment and recreation. The new issue was water clean for summer swimming and fishing. Neighbours teamed up to advocate for better septic tank placement, demanding that these tanks be located at least 50 feet from the water. These collaborations set the foundation for new community initiatives. Locals also lobbied for more parks for families and children. Looking out for each other—and the future—remained an Eagle Bay priority.

As community needs changed over time, farming lost its central role, and the FI became inactive. In response, community representation shifted to the Eagle Bay Community Hall and Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD). Through every era, one thing remained constant: the power of unity.

Eagle Bay's pioneers faced tough times but created a strong, caring community through everyday kindness and teamwork. Their legacy reminds us that real community grows from small, steady acts between people. When neighbours help each other, share a laugh, and look ahead together, that spirit of unity lasts. Let's keep it going, one story, one good deed, and one act of community at a time.

If you have a free afternoon, stop by the Hall to explore the Renee Hester files. This living scrapbook captures Eagle Bay's past and the people who shaped it. Their stories and celebrations continue to echo through the community.