

Fonds 814

Chilliwack Museum and Historical Society
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Accession no. 988.49

Inventory completed by Michael A. Avery
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The origins of the Chilliwack Museum and Historical Society could be said to go as far back as 1903 (ca.). Horatio Webb and his Chilliwack Pioneer Association were collecting archival material from about 1921. His association was responsible for collecting the group of 64 portraits of pioneers who had lived in Chilliwack before 1871. Copies of these photos were donated to the City of Chilliwack and the Township of Chilliwack. These same photos now hang in the Programming Room of the Chilliwack Museum. Horatio Webb died in 1936, taking the life of the Chilliwack Pioneer Association with him.

In the early 1940's Clarence Casey Wells attempted to organize The Chilliwack Historical and Pioneer Association. They held their first meeting in January 1940 and even had the minutes of the meeting broadcast on radio a little over a year later. Not enough interest was generated in starting a historical society so The Chilliwack Historical and Pioneer Association died in its infancy.

Years later in the 1950's interest was renewed in the idea of a historical society. The editor of The Chilliwack Progress wrote on the need for Chilliwack to save its heritage in 1956. The first general meeting of the Chilliwack Historical Society was Wednesday, April 10, 1957 in Chilliwack Senior High School. A constitution was drawn up and Oliver N. Wells (Casey Wells' brother) was elected the first president.

March 11, 1958 marked the opening of Chilliwack's first museum in a room in the Nowell Street police station. From this first secure location the museum was able to launch exhibits that included nature painting by Allan Brooks, photographs from the Dr. Jack Barber collection, exhibits from the Rock and Jade Club, and Canadian paintings loaned from the Vancouver Art Gallery. The museum later moved to the old library in 1962 (now the Chilliwack Community Services Building).

A major development in the forming of Chilliwack's Archives came in 1966 when Casey Wells received permission from the society to operate the Chilliwack Valley Archives from his own home. He was paid an honorarium and until his death in 1976 he ran the archives.

On January 21, 1971 the society changed its name to Chilliwack Valley Historical Society.

Thursday, December 2, 1971 marked the day a new wing of Evergreen Hall was completed. It would be the new home of the museum. It was named the Wells Centennial Museum in honor of the Wells family's contributions to the museum and community. The new museum provided more work and exhibit space and an area for the expanding archives.

In September 1981 the society changed its name again, this time to the Chilliwack Museum and Historical Society. Also in 1981 the society received use of the old city hall on Spadina Avenue. The society struggled to get funding that would renovate the building, and after five years they finally succeeded. Six months later in 1987 the museum had its grand opening at the new location. The museum also changed its name to the Chilliwack Museum. The old location at Evergreen Hall was also renovated for use of the continually expanding archives as well as storage facilities for artifacts not on display at the museum.

