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The old South Gabriola School on the *left* with the old Community Hall on the *right*. In the 1970s, the school, which no longer exists, was being used as St. Martin's Anglican Church. The old Community Hall shown here was destroyed by fire in 1979; its present-day replacement was opened in 1984. There once was a teacher's house close to where the photographer is standing.

The South Gabriola Public Hall 1913–79

by E. Joyce White

*This article is based on the original Social Club Minute Book held in the Gabriola Museum Archives. There's also an account in June Harrison's book, *The People of Gabriola*, pp.246–8.*

When a group of Gabriola's earliest citizens met at the South School on May 31, 1913, a Gabriola tradition began that is still active to the present day; namely, providing a Community Hall for the island.

At the time, the stated purpose of the meeting was to organize a Social Club for "mutual purposes". The representatives elected were J.W. Jolley president, J. Gray vice president, and C.B. Hobson secretary/treasurer. Also elected was a Board of Trustees for a building lot, to be

donated by Mr. Shaw. These were J.W. Jolley, W.N. Shaw, and M. Edgar.

The next recorded minutes of the Social Club were for November 4, 1913, when the treasurer reported a balance of \$292.50. As the treasurer, Mr. Hobson was leaving Gabriola temporarily; Mr. J. Gray was elected to take over the books.

At the meeting of February 10, 1914, there was a proposal to build a hall, 30 × 60 × 16 feet, on land donated by Mr. William Nairn Shaw. This is where the present Community

Hall stands today, and it adjoins the land donated by Mr. John Kemp in 1872-3 for the building of a school.

A building committee was appointed and an estimate was to be presented the following week. Mr. Degnen and Mr. Silva volunteered to bring the required lumber in on the brickyard scow. At this meeting, Mr. Jolley tendered his resignation as president and Mr. Samuel Martin took over as acting president.

The secretary was instructed to write to Victoria Lumber, Ladysmith Lumber, and the Merchants Trading Companies for estimates.

Mr. Shaw was asked if he was giving land with sufficient room for the building, and, as the remaining three-cornered piece of land was of no use to him, he said he would donate that along with original parcel. This is where the playground is now.

When World War I was declared in August 1914, some Gabriola men went overseas to serve. There were no further entries in the Minute Book during this time, but there must have been some activity on the home front because the next entry, October 25, 1919, recorded that the meeting was held in the "Public Hall". The Gabriola Community Hall Association notes of 1982, prepared for incoming board members, also notes that the original hall was "built approximately 1917".²²

²² There has been confusion over the years between the Community Hall and the South School. The photograph on page 14 of *SHALE* 11, for example, has the caption: "Some of the children attending the South School in 1908 on the steps of the Community Hall with the school in the background". This caption is wrong; the children are in fact standing on the steps of the school and the building in the background is a long-gone residence built for the schoolteacher in 1876. There was no Community Hall before *circa* 1917.

On November 8, 1919, a committee was appointed to draft a Constitution for the government of the Hall. This was presented to the Board and, following amendments, was adopted

A Basket Social and Dance was planned for November 1 of that year. Mrs. Edgar and Mrs. Gray were appointed to look after the baskets and Mr. Edgar and Mr. Sam Young volunteered to look after the fire and make the coffee. Mr. Silva and Mr. Chapple would obtain wood for the fire and music for the dance.

This was the first of many dances held over the years. In January 1920, a dance was held in honour of Lydia Degnen, who was leaving the Island to attend school in Victoria. Also honoured were Mr. F. Degnen and Mr. McHugh, in appreciation of their musical services. There were also New Year's Eve Dances, Fund Raising Dances, Valentine's Day Dances, Thanksgiving Day Dances, a Masquerade Ball, and a Hayseed Dance, with donations of fruit and vegetables to be sold at auction. In June 1920, permission was sought and granted for use of the Hall for a Schoolchildren's Dance.

It was also decided that a social function of one kind or another would be held twice monthly at the now named South Gabriola Public Hall, and that a piano be bought. The music committee set up a piano fund and, on November 11, 1920, a piano was purchased from George A. Fletcher Music for \$400 with a \$150 down payment, the balance to be paid at \$15 per month. No interest to be charged if paid within 10 months. The last payment was made September 1921.

Permission was given October 20, 1920, for the Hall to be fixed up for games, providing no damage was done to the property. It was also suggested that an Athletic Club be



Badminton has always been a popular use of the Community Hall. The schoolchildren used to play here too. It was also used regularly for movies, a forerunner of The Roxy.

formed and, on October 26, a request was granted to the Zig-Zag Sports Club for the use of the Hall, two evenings per week at five dollars per evening. The South Gabriola Public Hall would provide fuel and lights and, when admittance is charged, the Hall to get half of the door receipts.

During these years, there were many requests for the rental of the Hall. The Deputy Returning Officer for Gabriola South was granted its use for the December 1, 1920, election, at a cost of five dollars. This was the standard fee at the time.

In November 1921, a letter was sent to Gabriola Shale Products asking for a donation of bricks for two chimney flues. In his reply, Mr. W.D. Campbell of Gabriola Shale Products stated that the company could not see its way clear to donate sufficient bricks for the erection of two flues until clear deeds were obtained to the parcel of land. Once these were obtained, the Company would be pleased to give the

bricks required for the heating system. The secretary was instructed to write to the Surveyor General in Victoria regarding the proceedings required in obtaining the necessary document.

This was done, and ten dollars was sent to Jackson Bough Allan, Sept. 6, 1923, concerning the property deeds. One dollar was paid to W.N. Shaw for the legal conveyance, and six dollars to the Land

Registry Office.²³ At the Annual General Meeting of the South Gabriola Public Hall, December 9, 1924, the document was read and accepted.

Back in December 1921, the Board discussed "building room for kitchen" and noted, "School Trustees to be asked for use of lumber of the old house on school property". This is interesting as there has always been some uncertainty as to where the original schoolhouse and adjacent teacher's residence were built in 1872-3 and 1876, and this note suggests that the school has always been on the same spot next to where the Community Hall is now, and the residence was in what-are-now woods just

²³ The registration for some reason was never completed and Mike Pelzer recently had to make use of a letter found in the Gabriola Museum Archives to straighten out the legalities of ownership on behalf of the Community Hall Association.



The old Community Hall, north side.

beyond the parking lot on the east (uphill) side of it.²⁴

A meeting of the Hall Board was held at Mrs. Edgar's, October 25, 1925, to discuss ways and means of adding a kitchen to the Hall. Joe Chapple with W. Taylor was the successful bidder for this work.

Finances were apparently pretty tight at that time, and at the Nov 20, 1925, meeting it was proposed that smaller bills be paid, and the largest left until money was raised. It was decided to pay \$16.50 for lumber from Singers Mill, \$13 for lumber from Sunrise Mill, and for nails and a pipe cap. Ed Silva was to receive \$10 for hauling the lumber from the brickyard to the Hall.

There was a request in December for use of the Hall for the school's Christmas tree and this was granted.

On January 4, 1926, the Board discussed means of raising funds to pay off the Hall

²⁴ Ron Ewing recalls a derelict house there *ca.* 1970. It was a play-place for kids, and still had old junk furniture in it. Some of the lumber eventually was used to build the nursery just up the road.

debt. It was decided that dances and whist drives would be held alternate weeks, and expenses curtailed as much as possible. These measures were apparently successful as at the April 24 meeting of that year there was a cash balance of \$100.

During the mid 1930s, the Athletic Club seems to have

been the most active group, and on October 2, 1933, it was moved that the officers of the Athletic Club act as the Executive of the Hall under President Robert Gray, and Secretary/Treasurer N. F. Sear.

This continued throughout the rest of the thirties with the Athletic Club holding their badminton nights twice weekly, on Mondays and Thursdays.

In February 1941, a meeting was held to discuss the re-roofing of the Hall. A house-to-house canvass of South Gabriola was made to raise funds so that the roof could be installed in the summer of 1941. It was recommended that a contract for re-shingling the roof be given to a local carpenter rather than ask for volunteer labour. The bid of Mr. McBride, manager of the brickyard, was accepted

At the November 24, 1944, Annual General Meeting, it was moved that a chimney be built on both sides of the Hall.

The question of insuring the Hall for fire protection was raised at the May 17, 1946, meeting. It was decided to award the

contract to Canadian Home Assurance. The building was insured for \$2000 and the contents for \$300 at a cost of \$41.40 for three years. The insurance was increased May 11, 1952, to \$5000 at a cost of \$90 for three years.

The piano, which had served the Club for twenty-six years, was now in need of repair or replacement. At a meeting June 24, 1946, the advisability of having it repaired or of buying another one was discussed. The cost of repairing the existing piano was to be \$90, but instead, it was decided to purchase a secondhand piano in excellent condition for \$200. This was done at a total cost of \$206.28. Two hundred dollars for the piano, five dollars for the piano movers, one dollar for the ferry, and 28¢ for a 'phone call regarding the piano. Mr. Tufnail loaned his truck and Mr. Silva his time to transfer the piano from the ferry to the Hall, where he was met by Mr. Sear and Mr. McKecheran who helped him unload it and move it into the Hall.

This was followed by a dance, August 3, 1946, with the proceeds going to pay for the piano. The visiting pianists, Mrs. Logan and Mrs. S.E. Smith, donated their services and the fund raised \$70.50 after expenses

On October 9, 1946, the Board received a letter from Mr. S. Carver, schoolteacher, asking for the Hall during noon hours for the children to play badminton. The request was "granted on condition that children are supervised, running shoes are worn, and children refrain from touching lamps."

At a combined meeting of the Hall Committee and the Sports Club, December 18, 1946, it was decided that the Hall Committee purchase an electric light plant. The money for a light plant was loaned by President Roy Tufnail and Les Withey with the understanding that this debt be paid

within a year. All future money raised by the Hall Committee to be used to settle this account first.

This made it possible to show movies, and these became a regular Thursday night event. In May 1952, there was a further advance with the rental of movies in technicolour at a cost of \$25 per night.

The final entry in the South Gabriola Public Hall Minute book was February 23, 1954, with a discussion of extension of membership and ownership of the Hall to be given to all Gabriola residents. A special meeting was to be called to change the Constitution.

The building served the Gabriola Community well for another twenty-six years, until it was consumed by fire on June 26, 1979.²⁵

Immediately after the fire, in July 1979, the Board of Directors convened to discuss rebuilding the Hall. Under Bylaw 39, a building permit was granted in March 1981, but there were further obstacles along the way. Final permission to build was not received until September 1982.

In the meantime, Directors started negotiations with the School Board in February 1980 regarding leasing the adjoining 0.9-acre site. This was ratified in October and the land is now the Hall's parking lot, leased at one dollar a year, and the site of the annual Salmon Barbecue Fundraiser.

Construction began in September 1983, and the new Community Hall was opened in August 1984. ◇

²⁵ This date was established in a telephone conversation with the current Community Hall Director, Joyce Babula, in July 2009.