

Meetings: Tuesday 12 Noon

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## APRIL IS ENVIRONMENTAL MONTH

### Happy Birthday

Apr 05: Ken Holland

### Happy Anniversary

## Upcoming Speakers:

Apr 01: Dan Baxter  
MR Funeral Home

Apr 08: Laurie Anderson  
Women in Rotary

Apr 15: Ineke Boekhorst  
Belize Report

## LAST WEEK'S MEETING

President **Laurie Anderson** presided.

### Guests:

**Andy and Yvonne Barrisford.**

**Florence Thomas, Tyler Craig and Kim Hall**

### Club Announcements:

**District Assembly** at Kwantlen Polytech University in Surrey, April 5, 8 AM to 3 PM. There is still room to come, eat, and learn about Rotary (carpool ride is available). Those currently signed up to attend are Claire, Sharon, and Alex and Barbara. Our Rotary club will pay for cost.

**District Conference** in Tulalip, Washington - May 2 - 4. So far, only President-elect Alex and Barbara, and President Laurie have signed up to attend.

**Winefest** — PLEASE SELL TICKETS! — Available through [rotarywinefest.ca](http://rotarywinefest.ca) or from Centra Lawyers Office (\$50 per ticket).

We still need Silent Auction Items for this event which will be held on May 14 at the Sky Hangar, at Pitt Meadows Airport. All Rotary members are asked to either donate a bottle of wine (or to donate \$20 to purchase a bottle of wine) for wine baskets to be sold at the event as a fundraiser. Also, if any members have one or more of the square-shaped spaghetti sauce glass jars, please bring them ASAP to a club meeting (as these jars are used for flower arrangements).

**Duck Race:** we need sponsors for the 2025 Duck Race - if you know anyone who could sponsor this fundraiser, please let the club know.

**Pub Hub** - Thursday, March 27, 5:30 PM at the Jolly Coachman Pub in Pitt Meadows - come by yourself or with family and friends, and enjoy a meal and good fellowship with your fellow Rotarians.

Happy and Sad Dollars included (but were not limited to):

**Ineke** is off to Belize on a Rotary International project, with team of 13 Rotarians, from April 1 April 15. They are going to a remote part of Belize in the jungle where the temperatures are expected to be in the range of 28 to 32°C, and she has to get vaccinated. She has to take a long flight from Vancouver to Toronto, and then to Belize. (What dedication!) She will be teaching "concept maps" to children who cannot yet read, so that they can communicate via pictures or symbols. [Concept maps present information about the things or subjects in a simple, visual way.]

**Alex** will be driving his Tesla to the District Conference where his Tesla will hopefully be safe from vandalism once he crosses the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

Program: The Whonnock Society – Florence Thomas and Tyler Craig



**Xwéwenaqw Xwexwilmexw**  
(aka Whonnock People)  
Cultural Reclamation Society



**Tyler Craig** is the Program Manager of the Whonnock Cultural Reclamation Society (the Whonnock Society). He is from Alberta and has Métis heritage. As an Indigenous professional with experience in corporate services, educational workshop development and Indigenous relations, he works to foster understanding and create opportunities within Indigenous communities. A significant part of his work revolves around securing grant funding for various programs aimed at community development. He introduced Florence Thomas.



**Tyler Craig**

**Florence Thomas**, who is now 79 years old, is one of the senior (if not the most senior) Whonnock matriarch living today. The Whonnock people had a Matriarch governance, represented under a leadership system where women play a central role in decision-making and community life. Traditionally, while men carry out essential roles as warriors, protectors, and hunters, the matriarchs serve as the heart of the community. They maintained oversight of the relationships between the people, the land, and future generations, ensuring all decisions reflected long-term sustainability and communal harmony. Florence spoke to us about her experience.



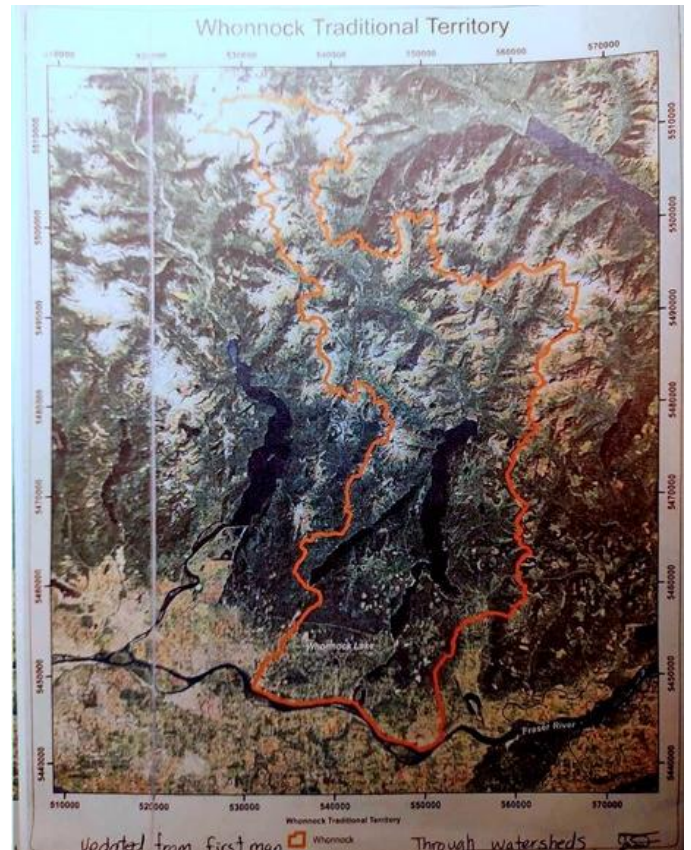
**Florence Thomas**

### What is the Whonnock Society?

The Whonnock Cultural Reclamation Society the (“Whonnock Society”) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and revitalizing the cultural heritage, traditions, and ancestral lands of the indigenous Whonnock People. The Society is led by the matriarchs who provide direction to those who are working to accomplish their goals. This traditional governance is not recognized by the Indian Act, and through the work of the Society they endeavour to restore the rightful standing of the matriarchs as the leaders of the Whonnock people. Their aims are to foster a deep connection to the land and empower future generations to carry forward the wisdom and teachings of their ancestors through community engagement, education, and cultural programs. They focus on revitalizing and celebrating the language, culture and traditions of the Whonnock People, and to build a better future for the next generation. They host events like fundraisers, community gatherings, and cultural workshops to connect, learn, and honor their shared heritage. They are committed to developing collaborative relationships within Maple Ridge and surrounding communities to foster unity. Their economic and social planning requires the support of the local communities so that together they can develop a cohesive economy.

### Florence’s Presentation

The area in Maple Ridge known as Whonnock adopted its name from the local First Nation people meaning the “place of the hump-back salmon.” First Nation people have been living continuously in the area for thousands of years.



The Whonnock indigenous people used to preside over 2,000 acres from Alouette to Stave, and south to the north bank of the Fraser.

As recently as 2012, the Whonnock people existed on a 92-acre reserve on parcels of land administered by the Kwantlen nation, whom Florence says largely ignores their plight. Today, only three small parcels of land remain.



The Whonnock used to be independent, but were merged with the Fort Langley tribe under the Kwantlen umbrella in 1929. Florence long ago declared that she wanted the Whonnock tribe to be separate from Fort Langley, and as a result became an outcast, and receives no support from the Kwantlen people. The Whonnock people are no longer officially recognized as a first nation group, and there is currently an ongoing court case about that issue. Florence and others are working to pass down their cultural ceremonies to their younger people so that these traditions will not be lost.

Florence grew up in what is now both modern-day Maple Ridge and Mission. As a child she was seized by the state and placed in Mission's St. Mary's Residential School for Indians at Heritage Park for six years. It was a time when the First Nations peoples were not allowed to participate in their traditional ways, but Florence says she is trying to follow her cultural ways. As a result even today, although she can understand her native language, but has lost the ability to speak it without difficulty.

Florence has been without a house since 2003, when health inspectors condemned it and had it torn down. She was placed into native housing but because she had so many of her grandchildren living with her, she was forced to leave. She has been homeless ever since. She lives in a trailer that has no running water or electricity and she has to rent a porta potty for a toilet. She has almost lost all her hearing in one ear and is blind in one eye.



**Florence Thomas in 2012 (Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows News)**

With three living daughters (one daughter died), four sons, 30 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren, Florence has a large family, many of whom struggle to survive off the reserve. She estimates that there are approximately 125 Whonnock people still living today. Her ultimate wish and goal is to get back some land for the Whonnock tribe, and re-establish her tribe's footprints back on their traditional territory, and build a brighter future for the Whonnock people.

On Saturday, May 17, 2025, Whonnock Society is holding a fundraiser at the Albion Centre located at 24165-104<sup>th</sup> Ave., Maple Ridge, called the Spirit of Whonnock: An Evening of Music and Culture, with a live performance by Tia and Fawn Wood, cultural presentations honouring indigenous heritage, and traditional food and drink available for sale.

#### Quote for the Day

Volunteering is at the very core of being a human. No one has made it through life without someone else's help.

*Heather French Henry*

meetville.com

**Submitted by Laurie Anderson**