

DR. J.E. WHITING

Dr. Ted Whiting was administrator at the Wrinch Memorial Hospital for many years. He retired in 1976 and moved to Penticton.

Dr. Whiting says, "Hazelton is a very old community - much older than other communities around here. Older than Smithers and Prince Rupert which were just railroad towns." Hazelton is situated at the forks of the Skeena and Bulkley, has good fishing and has gone on for many generations. There was no railroad and no rails - just trails.

Around the turn of the century river boats started to run. Port Essington was one of the old Indian Villages and it became the head port for the river boats that came from Port Essington to Hazelton. The nearest place to the east was Fort George. Horses and dog sleds were used for transportation. Dogs were used as pack animals the year round. A good pack dog could carry 40 pounds.

White traders arrived between 1850 and 1860 and later, other whites. With them came white man's diseases - small pox, measles and tuberculosis. Small pox would wipe out almost an entire village in those days. Whites also brought dance halls and bars.

Steamers came next and ran until the railroads came. Hazelton was the head town for navigation. Where the name came from isn't certain, but Dr. Whiting feels it's a white man's name for sure and was probably named because of the many wild hazelnut bushes growing here. Hazelton - named for it's NUTS!

Gold was discovered at Madison Creek in the late 1800's. It was not as large as the gold rush to the Yukon, but there was a rush of miners into the creek. One of the most important take-off points for the Madison Creek gold field was Hazelton. The trail ran overland to Babine and Tatlow Lake and on to Madison Creek.

Pack horse trains ran from Hazelton to Fort Babine. Cataline's name seems to be woven into every man's tale of pack horses and pack trains with various additions. Snow came early in the fall and stayed late in the spring. The snow was heavy and "snow shoes" were tied on the horses feet. These were not regular snow shoes, of course, but sacks filled with bulky hay and tied on. This gave bulk to the horse's feet so they couldn't sink deeply into the snow.

Dr. Whiting recalls, as others do, that pack horses carried everything: mining machinery, disassembled was taken in on horses. Pianos even sometimes made it.

In 1899, Dr. Wrinch arrived in Hazelton. He was a pioneer, medical missionary with the Methodist Church who started the medical work here. He was the only doctor in the country between here and Kamloops. Dr. Wrinch was from Belleville, Ontario and came to the coast by rail, then to Hazelton by Indian dug-out canoe. It is assumed steamers weren't running at that time of year. Many things interrupted the steamer's run; low water, winter or logs in the water.

Dr. Tomlinson, another doctor to come to the area, worked a while with Dr. Wrinch. In 1901 the first hospital was built in Hazelton. In 1913 the first train from Montreal to Prince Rupert came through Hazelton. When the railway started operating, the river boat traffic ceased. All this brought more work and patients to Dr. Wrinch. In 1931 Dr. Wrinch planned and built the next hospital. This was an L shop, built around the two sides of the old hospital which was later torn down. ^{left the} They left the basement of the old hospital and the ground floor and put a roof over it. They used the ground floor as a drying shed for years and years, for drying linen. The basement was used as a fruit cellar for years after the new hospital was in operation.

Frances Willar was one of the graduates from Dr. Wrinch's training school for nurses here. Frances returned to work here after her graduation. Part of her training was in Vancouver.

Dr. Wrinch was an active man in the community. He was Liberal M.L.A. for the area and worked hard. He officiated at the opening of the Hagwilget Bridge in the 1930's. He retired in 1935 and his son, Dr. Leonard Wrinch, carried on for a while. Dr. G. Large and Dr. Eric Austin followed. Dr. Large was also an active community member and historian. He wrote "Skeena, River of Destiny", which is a history of the area. After leaving here, he practiced medicine in Prince Rupert and Bella Bella.

A bridge from New Hazelton to Old Hazelton was built. The main way to get to the railroad from Old Town was to cross the low level bridge at Old Town which crossed the Bulkley River over to Mission Flats, then up to South town. This bridge was washed out in the late '40s by a big flood and was never rebuilt. Hazelton

was left with only the Hagwilget Bridge after co-existing for a number of years.

Dr. Whiting became interested in Wrinch Hospital because it was a mission hospital. He and his wife came to Hazelton in 1939 from Toronto. He and Marjorie drove out here and arrived January 9, 1939 to get his first glimpse of Wrinch Hospital and Hazelton. There were no paved roads and no black top north of Ashcroft. The snow covered gravel road didn't give them any trouble. Snow did give them trouble and they were forced to overnight and a day in Houston til the snowplough cleared clogged roads.

On his arrival, Dr. Whiting found few cars and the main way of getting around was to walk. Al Benson did have a taxi and this was used a lot to transport patients.

In 1939 the nurse's residence was built and an addition put to it in 1945.

Dr. Whiting recalls, "I think Dr. Lenoard Wrinch, son of the old doctor filled in for two years. He didn't stay retired very long for he left this world in 1939. I think when we were here that we got word that he had died. Transportation to places like Kitwanga and all kinds of places along the way were entirely by rail. There was no road from Hazelton to Rupert in those days other than the railroads. You could drive as far as Kitseguetla along the route of the present highway, more or less, but it was just a dirt road with grass growing up between the two ruts. And when you got to Kitseguetla that was the end of the road. You couldn't drive any further. If you wanted to go to Kitwanga, you had to go by train. This is what we used to do all the time. But actually speaking, Kitwanga village would have been there long ago. They would have their dug-out canoes.

One of Dr. Whiting's early, unusual cases was when a woman was brought to the hospital on a speeder on the railroad tracks to be delivered of twin girls. Dr. Whiting says "The Indian people have progressed remarkably in the meantime since 1939. Relations between the races have improved greatly. The races mix socially much better."

When asked whether drug abuse is on the decline or increase, Dr. Whiting answered, "If in drugs you mean alcohol, or this sort of thing, we do have some of the other drugs. There's been a lot

of talk about other drugs, marijuana, heroin and so on, but the worst drug and the biggest problem by far is alcohol, and it is a drug and it is the cause of many times as much heartache as these other drugs, and they are sad things, too, the other drugs. But, the real heartbreaker is the way alcohol is used and abused all the time, every week.

First of all people that are concerned about alcohol and health make the alarming statement that alcohol is killer number three. That in one way or another alcohol is the third commonest cause of death in our society and heart disease is the commonest, cancer is the next commonest and alcohol related diseases, violence, highway deaths and so on is the third commonest cause of death. In British Columbia, which we would expect to be fairly conservative because the government likes to think it makes money out of the sale of alcohol, but according to government statistics published just two or three years ago, there are 70,000 alcoholics in B.C. This is chronic alcoholism.

My personal opinion is that man's a sinner and this works out itself in so many ways. The profit motive has done so much to promote the sale of alcohol and still is. Time magazine has the most beautiful coloured 'ads'. In the liquor ads invariably they present other drinking custom as a glamorous thing, very attractive to the young people. Of course, they never show any of the heartaches that goes along with this. It's the thing to do and everybody jokes about the drunk. The drunk is the saddest thing you see in our society and you see it all through. It's not something to laugh at but everybody laughs at someone who is drunk.

"Tobacco is a killer, too," says Dr. Whiting. "I'm glad they put a warning in the advertising that smoking is harmful to health. It is harmful to health. But no such warning is in the liquor ads, the number three killer."

When Dr. Whiting retired, a book of pictures of a hundred babies he had delivered was presented to him. "Although," says Dr. Whiting, "I believe in the mother having the baby, not the doctor having the baby. But, anyway this book that was presented to me, and it's just a lovely gift, and it's got pictures of several hundred babies that were born in the hospital here and in the hospital at Bella Coola, while I was there for fourteen years between 1940 and 1955.

I was away from Hazelton for those fourteen years and then returned in 1955. There is a long list of the names of the Bella Coola babies in the book and I think there are more people on the list than have pictures."

Dr. Whiting retired to the Okanagan to his 160 fruit trees and is still enjoying his retirement there with his wife, Marjorie.