

## LANDMARKS

### Royal Oak Hall a tribute to community co-operation

The Royal Oak Community Hall is not only a reminder of the Women's Institute, with which the building has a lengthy association, but of the special part the building has played in the development of this Saanich community.

The name, Royal Oak, was derived from a large oak tree which stood adjacent to the first Royal Oak Inn belonging to pioneer settler Richard Cheeseman in 1862. That was across the road from the community hall.

It was in the spring of 1918 that the Women's Institute was started with meetings taking place in members' homes. In September, Mrs. A. Richards was elected president and Mrs. Carmichael became secretary-treasurer. The Carmichaels were among the first permanent settlers in the Carlotta Bay area, where there were only a half dozen homes at the turn of the century. J. B. Carmichael was the assessor of Saanich municipality from the start in 1886 until 1902.

As is often usual, streets and roads bear the names of the local landowners and their families. Wilona Avenue is a case in point. The name is composed of the first letters of the Carmichael

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children, Wally, Esther and Mary.

Esther married William Quick, who operated the first Jersey cow farm in Saanich. His varied interests led him to form the Saanich and Suburban Baseball League. He built a home on a prominent ridge on Wilkison Road, in 1911, and it is still in good shape. Both he and his wife were very active in community affairs. Their son, Fred, was mayor of Saanich and during his term was responsible for the construction of First Saanich Road.

The newly-formed Royal Oak Women's Institute had little difficulty emulating the efforts of Messrs. Quick, Carmichael and others to build a community hall in 1911, the same year that the municipal hall was built immediately to the south on West Saanich Road.

The wood-frame building was well proportioned and the prominent entrance was flanked by matching projections, each with a minor hip-type of gable. The front facade was provided with four windows, the upper ones sporting

arched leaders. A series of decorative roof brackets runs under all the eaves and the exterior of the building is finished with clapboard siding with the upper part shingled.

With many Royal Oak families donating their time and money to the project, it is no wonder that the community hall has for years been a focal point of the community through numerous meetings, social and sports events.

In October, 1938, the trustees of the hall sold the building and land to the Institute for \$1,000, and Saanich municipality provided a grant of \$200 in respect of the value of the land (this was in lieu of land since it was practice to provide land for community projects).

The building received heritage designation in 1975, thereby ensuring that the external appearance will remain the same, and it continues to serve as a reminder of a community working together and sharing its fortunes, as well as setbacks, both in peacetime and in wartime.

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*The Times Colonist*

1911

4516 West Saanich Road

Quick, Richards, Pim, Ferris, Carmichael, Durrance

William John and Esther Quick provided the initial impetus for building the Royal Oak Community Hall. Funds and labour were donated by interested families, and the land was purchased cheaply from John Durrance. Mr. Hetherington, in charge of construction, was mainly assisted by Carmichael, Grant and Elliot. The hall was used for dances and whist drives, basketball games and Royal Oak Women's Institute Flower Shows, held from 1912 until 1956. The Women's Institute, formally organized by Mrs. Watt in 1910, met in members' homes until 1930, when they bought the hall for \$1500. It has been used for a variety of activities, including Saanich Council meetings before the new municipal hall was built.

This eclectic structure, with a low-pitched hipped roof and brackets under the eaves, is a two-storey version of the vernacular Edwardian bungalow. The symmetrical front facade has an entrance inset between two bays topped with small hipped roofs. The bottom two-thirds of the building has drop siding and, above a wide string course, the top third is cedar shingled. The front windows are opaque coloured glass and the top windows have a Tudor arch.