

Phyllis A. Woolard

August 10, 1921–September 28, 2016

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Driving along William Head Road, past the café, and down the hill towards Taylor Road, you may have noticed a sign to your left reading "Benacre" and perhaps for a minute or two, wondered about the property. This is the story of Phyllis Anne Woolard whose home this was for 80 years.

Phyllis was born in Crawford Bay, BC, on August 10, 1921. Her mother, Ursula, was the daughter of an English sea captain who moved to the Kootenays from England when he retired, because he thought it was the most beautiful country he had ever seen.

Phyllis's father, Arthur Houghton, was an outdoorsman who had travelled from England to New Zealand and then to the Kootenays, where he too fell in love with its beauty. So it was that Arthur and Ursula met, married, and had four children – Basil, Kathleen, Daphne and Phyllis.

Not long after Phyllis was born the Houghton family moved to the north of Wales. It was here that Ursula died in

1931, when Phyllis was only ten. Their father brought the children back to Crawford Bay.

Several times each year the young Houghtons travelled via steamship and the old Kettle Valley train from Crawford Bay to Vancouver and Victoria to attend school. When their father died in 1936 all four became the wards of their aunt – Nancy Gooch, Ursula's sister.

Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Gooch (widow of Jack Gooch, a retired major) came to Vancouver Island to search for a property that would be close to Victoria. She looked in East Sooke and Metchosin and decided upon 60 acres on William Head Road, a property that had been part of Sir James Douglas's hunting lodge before it was owned by the Fishers of Metchosin. A house was built and Mrs. Gooch and Phyllis moved here in 1938. The property was named Benacre after the Gooch family home in England.

During World War II, Phyllis worked at the Esquimalt Dockyard while living with her aunt at Benacre.

When the war ended and Phyllis was about 24, she used an inheritance to build a spacious barn that still stands on an adjacent property. She purchased four registered mares and a registered stallion – Hindu Prince, great grandson of the famous Man O' War, one of the greatest thoroughbreds of all time.

Phyllis's good friend Diana Jenkins, daughter of Dr. Jenkins who worked at the quarantine station at William Head, also loved horses and was a working partner. For several years Phyllis raised, boarded, and raced horses, and farmed the property. When Nancy Gooch died in 1950, Benacre was left to Phyllis and her two sisters. In time sections of the property were sold including the barn, at which time Phyllis sold her horses. She was able to hold on to the centre section of Benacre by leaving Metchosin to work in hotels in Banff, California and Nevada. She returned to Metchosin as often as she could.

In 1962 Phyllis married Edgar Woolard, a mathematical astronomer with the US



Phyllis Anne Woolard with two of her horses.

government. They lived in Washington DC until Edgar retired and they moved to Arizona. The winters were spent exploring the Arizona desert, but every summer they returned to Benacre.

After Edgar died in 1979, Phyllis returned to live in her Metchosin home full time. She was strong and active, thinking nothing of taking the mower up the bluff to cut down dense thickets of gorse. The next 30 years of her life were filled with the things she loved most, her family, her dogs, and Benacre.

She was generous, kind, and appreciative. And though quick to put her young family in place with a stern look,

there was always a twinkle in her beautiful blue eyes.

It was Phyllis's wish to remain in her home as long as she could. Proximity of family made this possible as did a wonderful, live-in caregiver who was with her for the last two years of her life. Phyllis never complained and when her family would fuss over her because of some ailment or other she had, she would brush it off saying, "It's a long way from the heart."

Phyllis died peacefully in her sleep in her home on Benacre on September 28, 2016.

Devonian Regional Park



First attempts in 2002.

Moralea Milne photo

MORALEA MILNE

Devonian Park has always been a favourite of mine. I suppose it started when I lived within easy walking distance and found this small gem of a park that encompasses a diversity of habitat. From Douglas-fir dominated forest to open moss balds studded with gnarled Garry oaks, from Sherwood Creek with its blue-listed sea-run cutthroat trout to Sherwood Pond and the raucous spring calls of the breeding red-winged blackbirds, to the perpetual motion machine that is the ocean pounding or lapping onto the cobble shoreline, Devonian provides a place of bountiful nature to this sometimes weary resident.

Since 2002 a small, dedicated group has been removing broom and other invasive species from Devonian Park. As you can probably see from the two photos, taken a decade apart, the almost 4,000

hours we have spent there have made a difference. You might also notice how much my photography has improved since then! It is hard to remember how badly overrun and disfigured the park was with broom.

From the start of the rainy season, usually the beginning



Progress!

Moralea Milne photo

of November, through to the end of February, we meet every Sunday at 10:00 am. Some people go to church, we attend to our Devonian devotions, taking pleasure in restoring the natural landscape while enjoying the company of like-minded folks. There have been more than a few Sunday mornings when I've cocked open one bleary eye and thought seriously of re-engaging with my duvet, but once at the park I have never regretted the two hours of toil made swift by the company of excellent friends. Last week (Nov. 6) there was a plethora of emerald green and camouflage brown Pacific treefrogs hopping through the grass and shrubs while we tugged and pulled at the broom. Often there is an eagle or three overseeing our efforts and of course there is always an occasion or two when we meet and greet with the human and dog visitors to the park!

However, at 66, I believe I am the youngest of our crew (although far from the most fit and agile), and we would love to see some new recruits, of any age, who would join us in this stewardship initiative. The large "old-growth" broom is long gone, and removing the small seedlings that reappear with annoying regularity is not hard work. The daphne population has mostly been eradicated as well as the hollies, however the introduced Himalayan blackberries seem determined

to undermine our most full-some efforts. Vigilance is required!

If you would like to join us once, twice, or especially on a regular basis, please contact me, moraleamilne@gmail.com, and I will add you to our list. We meet at 10:00 am under most weather conditions, except severe wind, buckets of rain, or frozen, snow-covered ground. I was going to remark that it has been quite amazing that we rarely experience bad weather, but I wouldn't want to jinx us!

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