

Wanted: stories about the Trestle

The Citizen

Friday, September 24, 2010

Have you or anyone in your family got a story to tell about the Kinsol Trestle? Or maybe you've come across an old photo from one of your relatives that shows the Kinsol Trestle in use? Or maybe you used to work for one of the companies that used the rail line when it was in operation?

If any of those scenarios ring a bell (or a steam whistle!) you should consider getting in touch with the folks that are putting together a virtual exhibit of the Kinsol Trestle.

The Kinsol Trestle: Abandoned, Then Embraced, is the evocative title of a Virtual Museum of Canada (VMC) exhibit which the curators of the Cowichan Valley Museum & Archives and the Shawnigan Lake Museum are in the process of creating.

They've been collecting oral histories over the summer and this original research will be the main ingredient in their exhibit, which is expected to be launched sometime next spring.

"Collecting the oral histories of people who are -- and have been -- involved in the history of the Kinsol Trestle has been rewarding and exciting work," says Kathryn Gagnon, curator of the Cowichan Valley Museum & Archives. "And as often happens with oral histories, one interview will often lead to contacts for several more, giving us more stories and sometimes photographs as well."

Built by the Canadian National Railways and completed in 1920, the historic trestle spans the Koksilah River at mile 51.1 in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Abandoned in 1979, years of neglect and vandalism led some people to believe that the trestle could not be saved.

In 2007, international heritage conservation experts determined that the Kinsol was not only structurally sound but also culturally significant. The rehabilitation of the trestle got underway on July 2.

While the rehabilitation project is now underway, fundraising efforts continue to ensure that all the rehabilitation work gets done. Donations can be made online at www.kinsol.ca, by phone at 250-709-1087 or in person at 135 Third St. in Duncan.

Gagnon says that the oral histories collected for the VMC exhibit will become primary source material in the respective archives at the Cowichan and Shawnigan Lake museums, adding to existing archival material related to the Trestle.

"Oral history research for the Kinsol Trestle online exhibit has given us the opportunity to present powerful stories, record diverse contributions to the story of the Trestle and to deepen our understanding of our community's history," she added.

The exhibit will be online in the spring of 2011 and the museums gratefully acknowledge the support of Canadian Heritage and the Virtual Museum of Canada's Community Memories Program.

Do you have a story or photographs of the Kinsol Trestle? Contact the Cowichan Valley Museum & Archives at 250-746-6612, cvmuseum.archives@shaw.ca or the Shawnigan Lake Museum at 250-743-8675, shawniganlakemuseum@shaw.ca