



# Pioneer E.F. Wilson recalled

By MITCHELL SHERRIN  
Staff Writer

Expatriate islander Michael Morris offered an affable and engaging look at his great grandfather, island pioneer Reverend Edward Francis Wilson, during a meeting of the Salt Spring Historical Society at Central Hall on February 8.

Some 60 islanders were seated almost stones-throwing distance of the Wilson homestead, now the site of the Salt Spring Island Golf and Country Club, and St. Mark's Church, where Wilson served as rector from 1894 till 1909, during Morris' delightful chat.

As a result of Wilson's rich diaries and Morris' family stories, historical society members and guests learned a wealth of information about one of the most influential islanders of his time

and a great recorder of local history.

Wilson first came to Canada as a missionary in 1868 and founded the Shingwauk and Wawanish residential schools, as well as a school in Elkhorn Manitoba for the Ojibway people before he moved to the coast in 1892.

"He didn't just get into the word of God, he got them into the word of carpenters and boat makers," Morris said.

And Wilson had been an advocate for the influential Metis leader Louis Riel during the famous trial at Regina in 1885, noted Morris.

Wilson moved to B.C. when his health started to fail (since he had heard it was a "land of fruit, flowers and genial climate") and Morris shared an excerpt from Wilson's diary that described the move:

"Though perhaps it seems a mad thing to do, we sent two of our children as an advance guard to spy out the country, Winnifred age 18 years and Llewelyn 16 years. In early September we received first from our young pioneers and most enthusiastic were they about the glories of the new country."

Buoyed by reports from his children, Wilson moved out to the coast where weather wasn't exactly as expected. Morris read a letter written by his great-grandmother Elizabeth to her husband in December 1892 when he was called back to Manitoba.

"A strange and most unexpected change has come over my dream of a balmy and windless B.C.," she wrote. "I have never passed through two days of such utter misery. The wood is green and mostly roots, and everything in the house froze — the food, water, milk and saddest of all to me is the loss of all my lovely houseplants. The snow blew in every crack and the wind was terrific."

After a two-year stint in Victoria, Wilson visited Salt Spring and immediately decided to move to the island, where he bought a 100-acre property at Central.

Morris described, with great detail and wit, how Wilson sought to improve his farm (with updated annual tallies of pigs, chickens and pigs) and to marry off his five daughters over the next 10 years.

Islanders learned that Wilson also filled in as a doctor, narrowly escaped a house fire in 1895 and watched two of his children run off to the Klondike gold rush.

Historical events such as the Point Ellis Bridge accident, where 59 people were drowned in an overloaded streetcar at Victoria in 1896, were woven into Morris' narrative through familial connections to the events.

Morris also touched on the Boer War of 1900, the building of Central Hall in 1897, the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the sad catastrophe of 1898 when two young islanders were drowned in a boating accident — prompting creation of the memorial window that now adorns St. Mark's.

Once Morris finished his talk about Reverend Wilson, he recounted a few of his own memories about growing up on the island, which included: chasing sheep off the golf course as an early job, a \$9 fine for selling cider made from Scott farm apples, and his mother's work as a local telephone operator in an age when phone numbers had two digits.

Morris also recalled an amusing tale about how his great uncle Norman Wilson offered him a present of land for his wedding, which Morris declined because the property was difficult to access and sandwiched between two beaches. Instead Morris suggested he'd like a toaster — which he still uses as a doorstep — but he regrets turning down the property that eventually became the Long Harbour ferry terminal.

"The only property I own on this island is two plots behind the hall," the Nanaimo transplant quipped.

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cial signs during a  
Photo by Derrick Lundy

## R SURVEY

back. In recent weeks, we've made a few graphic  
an a redesign later in the year. Before we do that,  
This survey will be published for the next three

PENNY SAKAMOTO, Publisher, The Driftwood

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