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Port Essington dies in fiery blaze, buildings gutted, township's centre razed

Young boy's courage saves sister's life

The courage and resourcefulness of a six-year-old boy saved the life of his 19-month-old sister during the start of the disastrous Port Essington fire Tuesday.

He is Dean Wesley who, hearing his baby sister crying inside the family's burning home, went inside, found his sister and guided her out to safety on the Skeena River wharf.

The start of the fire was spotted by Mrs. Douglas Wesley when she and six of her children were returning from fishing on the wharf about 1:30 p.m. During vain efforts to put out the fire and alert neighbors the little girl went into the burning house.

Mrs. Wesley, whose husband is in Prince Rupert Hospital, and also another son, frantically searched through the house for the little girl. Failing to find her she went out through the flames into the open, getting slightly burned, and searched outside.

It was about this time that Dean heard the little girl crying. Mrs. Wesley did not, for some time know that the girl was safe and also she could not find Dean and thought she had lost two of her seven children in the flames.

The family lost all their possessions and are now being looked after at Friendship House in Prince Rupert under the guidance of Rev. Dr. R. W. K. Elliott.

Four families, who lost their possessions, have said they do not intend to return to Port Essington.

Blaze starts from broken mirror

By JOHN PAIN
News Editor of The Daily News

The historic 90-year-old northern township of Port Essington, once the leading settlement of northern British Columbia, was virtually wiped out by fire yesterday afternoon as the ancient old wooden buildings fell before the unchecked flames of a blaze thought to have started from sunlight reflected from a piece of broken mirror.

Although 25 buildings were totally destroyed and some 50 persons rendered homeless, no one was killed and only one was slightly singed while searching for her child.

The fire started about 1:30 p.m. when Mrs. Douglas Wesley and her family were coming back from the Port Essington wharf where they had been fishing. A child pointed out smoke coming from a shed next to the Wesley home. On entering the shed they found it in flames and scattered pieces of broken mirror around it. A beam of concentrated sunlight had thrown a sunbeam onto the wall of the Wesley home and this also was on fire.

From this point the fire spread unchecked, through the tinder-dry wooden buildings. The eastern portion of the township was gutted when Daily News Editor John Pain and Sports Editor Gary Oakes flew over the burning town in a chartered Columbia aircraft piloted by company director Ernie Leder. The fire was then movng against the westerly wind and the main buildings along the Dufferin Street, the main thoroughfare, were already well ablaze. The flames were clearly visible through the 3,000 foot high column of smoke from a distance of 15 miles.

One man seen fighting fire

The Department of Transport snagboat, Port Essington, was moored at the end of the long wharf and a few small fish boats were with her. At the end of the wharf a man stood with a hose emitting a small stream of water.

This was the only attempt seen in combatting the fire. As the aircraft circled one building fell in and the flames leapt a small gap to seize a long wooden building near the hotel, which was also later burnt to the ground.

Officials from the B.C. Forest Service and the Skeena Indian agency flew in as soon as they received information on the outbreak. The Forestry Service crew took with it two water pumps and some 5,000 feet of hose.

These men undoubtedly saved what little remains of the township. They were J. B. Cawston, ranger supervisor, R. J. Oskey radio operator, and Miles H. Nicholl, project supervisor. Due to choppy water near Port Essington, their aircraft had to land on the Ecstall river, some distance from the town and they manhandled their gear through bush trails to the fire site.

They flew out again at 9 o'clock last night to report the fire under control in the surrounding bush, the town safe apart from smouldering or further outbreaks; and the equipment was left with Chief Eddie Bolton and fishermen who had come from the fishing grounds to the assistance of Port Essington.

Only six adult males present

At the time of the outbreak 75 persons were in the port, of which six were adult males. All the other men were out fishing. They were recalled by radio and 100 vessels were reported to have assembled to aid the homeless and assist in fighting the fire.

Founded in 1870 by Robert Cunningham, an ex-Hudson's Bay Company factor from Port Simpson, the port grew from a fall fish camp used by Tsimpsean Indians, to one of the major northern ports. It was the centre of the paddle-wheel steamer traffic to the Hazelton goldfields, the coastal trade to Skagway and the Klondyke, a major timber site and a cannery centre.

During its heyday Dufferin Street and the other main portions of the town were among the lustiest of the north. The hotel destroyed in the fire yesterday was probably the last major landmark of this colorful northern era. Known to the Indians as "Spokeshute" when Cunningham first arrived, Port Essington became a centre of trade between the mainland and the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Tuesday's fire was the fourth — and probably the final one — in the history of the port. Although rapidly rebuilt in those days it is doubtful if much will be done today to rebuild the gutted town centre.

Onetime major trading post

The port's end as a thriving centre was signalled with the completion of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway from the east to Prince Rupert in April 1914 and the closure of many canneries along the south bank of the Skeena River.

The piles which once supported thriving canneries stand above the tide marks rotting tombstones to a past prosperity, that lined the shores with wharves and warehouses.

The total population of the port at its highest has been estimated at 3,000 persons, not including transients.

Forestry officials and Indian Superintendent R. H. S. Sampson flew into Port Essington again today to obtain an accurate estimate of the total damage, exactly which buildings have been destroyed and the total remaining.

Families have been evacuated to Port Edward and Prince Rupert where they are being cared for either by charitable organizations or relatives. Others have moved onto their salmon boats.

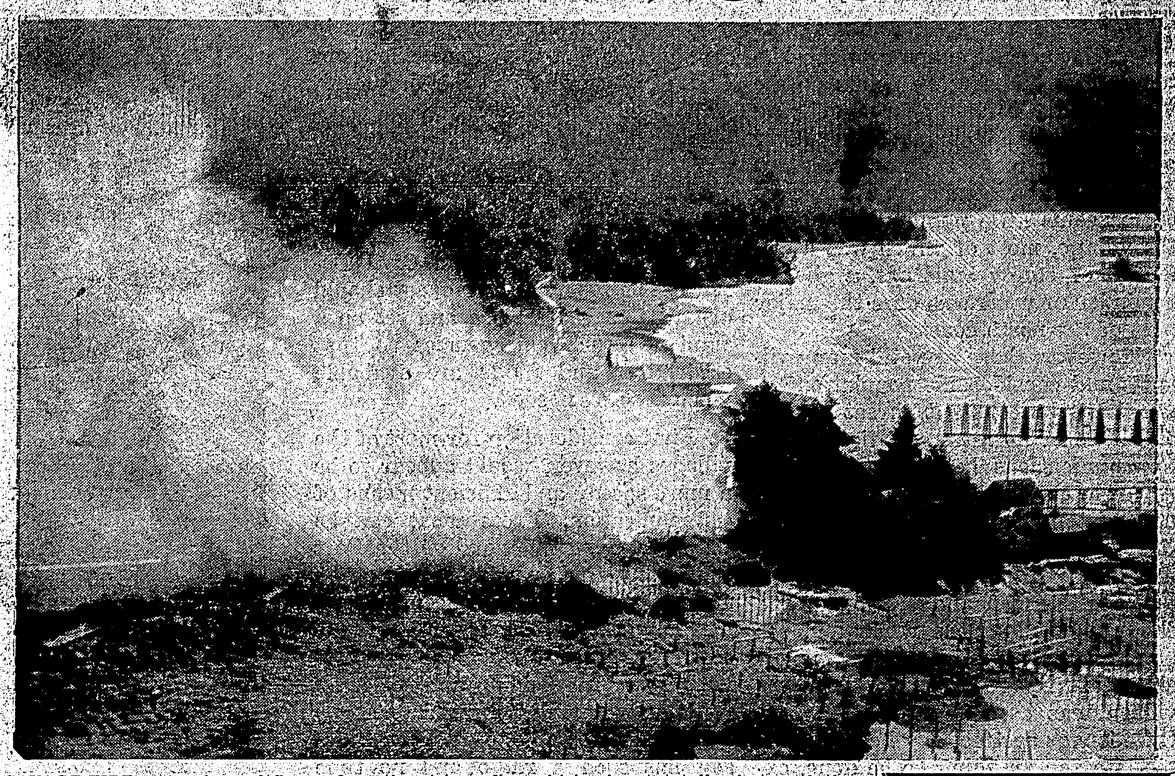
Lost buildings included the church, the old hotel, the store, community hall which was being used as a net loft and the balance of the lost buildings—now counted to be 25 by the forestry service—were residences and various other structures.

The school, which is being used to store the possessions of those who lost their homes, was not touched by the fire.

The main business block has been completely wiped out and it was only prompt action on the part of residents of Finn Town, adjacent to Port Essington on the Ecstall River, that saved it from going up.

Fire is still working its way sullenly through moss deposits and tree roots, the service reported. Eddie Bolton, chief of the Essington tribe, has been left in charge of the mopping up operations.

The families who lost their homes were: Douglas Wesley, George Brown, Felix Brown, Simon Lockerby, Gertie Brooks, Harold Bolton and Howard Starr. These families have either been accomodated with relatives or are accomodated on boats or have been brought to Prince Rupert to be cared for by welfare organizations.



SAVAGE FIRE — Smoke and flames from the vicious fire which almost totally destroyed the Indian village of Port Essington yesterday are visible in this photograph taken from a Columbia Airlines plane about 3:45 p.m. during the height of the blaze. The fire, which destroyed about 25 buildings, burned wildly for almost seven hours before three employees of the forestry department managed to bring it under control. About 50 people were left homeless because of the fire. — Staff Air photo by Gary Oakes

Workers strike to support insurgents

ALGIERS (AP) — Thousands of Moslem workers began a 24-hour general strike in Algeria today demonstrating loyalty to the regime of insurgent Premier Ferhat Abbas and protesting French threats to partition the North African territory.

There was no early sign of the violence that took 11 lives during a one-day walkout in Algiers July 1. A French spokesman warned that any large-scale killing would wreck peace negotiations between the French and the rebels, which he said resume next Monday, July 10.

In Algiers, docks were idle, Moslem businesses were shuttered and public transport barely limped with only European crews and armed guards. But police forced some Moslem shopkeepers to roll up their shutters and open for business.

Moslems at Bone stayed home and shops were closed. The story was the same at Blida, 26 miles south of Algiers, where four Moslems were killed when a riot developed during the strike last Saturday.

"The strike order will be gladly followed by 100 per cent of the Moslems," said Jacques Coup de Frejac, the chief government spokesman in Algiers. "The support for the rebellion cannot grow any more — it is total."

Frejac also warned "If there are 2,000 dead . . . there will be no negotiations."

Mrs. Kilpatrick dies in south

A former Prince Rupert woman who had spent part of her childhood at Port Essington, Mrs. G. P. (Reta) Kilpatrick, 65, died Tuesday at Vancouver after a long illness.

She was the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. John Dean, pioneer residents of this city. Mr. Dean was steam engineer at the Pioneer Laundry for many years.

She attended schools at Port Essington and Prince Rupert, and was married to George (Kil) Kilpatrick after the First World War. They subsequently moved to Vancouver where they operated the Green Apple Pie restaurant on Granville Street for many years.

Mrs. Kilpatrick is survived by her husband at 3702 West First, Vancouver; a son Gordon in Vancouver, a daughter Irene in Los Angeles, and two grandchildren.

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Fish landings top 2,000,000

Fish landings in Prince Rupert last week topped the 2,000,000-pound mark, the weekly report from the Department of Fisheries shows.

According to the report there were 2,245,500 pounds of fish, including 498,000 pounds of salmon, 1,540,500 pounds of halibut and 207,000 pounds of bottom fish, landed during the week.

The salmon catch was made up of: red spring, 90,000 pounds by gillnetter and 178,000 pounds by troller; white spring, 17,000 pounds gillnet and 49,000 pounds troll; coho, 1,800 pounds gillnet and 129,000 pounds troll; sockeye, 12,000 pounds gillnet and 500 pounds troll; pinks, 100 pounds gillnet and 2,000 pounds troll; and chums, 19,000 pounds gillnet and 500 pounds troll.

The halibut catch included 122,000 pounds of chix; 864,000 pounds of medium; 503,500 pounds of large; and 51,000 pounds of No. 2.

Bottom fish landings included: 65,000 pounds of sole; 36,000 pounds of grey cod; 2,000 pounds of black cod; 9,000 pounds of mink feed and 95,000 pounds of crab.

Salmon was landed by 11 seiners, 43 gillnetters and 69 trollers from Areas 1, 2, 3XYZ, 4, 5, 6 and also 2AE and W and 2BE and W.

A total of 20 large and 13 small craft from Areas 1, 2BE, 2 AE and International Pacific Halibut Commission Areas 2 and 3A.

Crab was brought in by five boats from Area 2AE while other bottom fish was taken by two otter trawls from Areas 3 and 4.

Child rescued at Kitkatla

A two-year old child is in satisfactory condition in Prince Rupert General Hospital today following a near-drowning mishap Tuesday at Kitkatla, an Indian village about 45 miles south of Prince Rupert.

The child, Earl Hill was flown to Prince Rupert about 8:30 p.m.

Further information could not be immediately learned.

DAILY NEWS PHONES

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Social Department	3206
Advertising Manager	3201

Penney top CCC executive in B.C. as Beaupre goes to another company

A. E. Penney, executive vice-president of Columbia Cellulose Company, Limited and Celgar Limited, has been appointed senior executive officer of the companies in British Columbia, it was learned here today from Vancouver.

The appointment was made at a recent board of directors meeting following the resignation of T. N. Beaupre, president of Columbia Cellulose Company, Ltd., and Celgar Ltd.

According to a Canadian Press report, Mr. Beaupre is about to take over the post of president of British Columbia Forest Products. He will succeed Charles D. Dickey, Jr.

M. W. Mackenzie, chairman of the boards of both Columbia Cellulose and Celgar will assume the additional responsibilities of president.

Mr. Penney graduated from the University of Toronto with a degree in chemical engineering. Since then, with the exception of five years war service, he has been engaged in the pulp and paper industry, being with Brown Corporation in La Tuque, Quebec and Brown Company in Berlin, New Hampshire, before joining Columbia Cellulose and Celgar in 1956.

Mr. Mackenzie joined the Chemcell group of companies in 1952 from Ottawa where he was deputy minister of trade and commerce and of defence production. He is the president of Chemcell Limited, the Royal Trust Company, Canada Iron Foundries Limited and Celanese Corporation of America. He is also a director of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce.

Mr. Beaupre, 43, one - time assistant deputy minister under the late C. D. Howe, resigned in 1954 to join Canadian Chemical and Cellulose and became president of the subsidiary Columbia Cellulose in 1957. Since then Canadian Chemical and Cellulose has been dissolved.

A. E. PENNEY
. . . top executive

M. W. MacKENZIE
. . . pro-tem president

T. N. BEAUPRE
. . . quits presidency

Tunnel block caused by rockfall

KITIMAT (CP) — A rockfall in the power tunnel near Kemano which caused the shutdown of a large part of the Aluminum Company of Canada's smelter here will take two months to repair and cost $2,000,000, the company said Tuesday.

N. S. Crerar, vice-president in charge of power operations, said he expects power generation at the Kemano powerhouse, 40 miles from here, can be resumed during the first week of September.

G. H. Gwyn, Manager of Alcan's Kitimat Works, said once the power supply is restored, the work of restoring Kitimat smelter operations will begin immediately.

"Meanwhile, the Kitimat casting department will continue to produce and ship extrusion ingot in the special alloys and shapes required by its customers and the temporary shutdown will not affect in any way deliveries of metal to the Company's customers," he said.

The rockfall occurred in a 10-mile tunnel which pipes water from Tahtsa Lake to the underground powerhouse at Kemano.

Four boats land fish

Four vessels landed halibut in Prince Rupert today.

Selling on the exchange were: County Jean with 36,000 pounds including 18,500 pounds of medium at 23 cents a pound, 7,000 pounds of large at 24 cents a pound and 500 pounds of chix at 12 cents a pound, to B.C. Packers; Twinkle, 25,000; 13,000 med (23), 11,500 large (24), 500 chix (14), to Babcock.

Advance II with 35,000 pounds and Hike with 3,600 pounds landed at the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative Association's plant at Fairview.

Indians form first national organization with Frank Calder as B.C. co-ordinator

The first Indian National Organization will hold its first convention in August in Regina, Frank Calder, MLA for Atlin announced today.

He has also been appointed as provincial co-ordinator. Mr. Calder is president of the Nishga Tribal Council as well as being a member of the legislature.

He had requested the formation of this wholly Indian body at the February meeting of the Greater Winnipeg Welfare Council where he was a guest speaker.

Each province will have a liaison officer, Mr. Calder said while William Wittunee of Regina has been appointed Dominion co-ordinator.

Both George Manuel, president of the North American Indian Brotherhood, and Guy Williams, president of the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, have welcomed the establishment of an Indian national organization in Canada.

The first convention date has been set for August 17, 18 and 19. Mr. Calder and Mr. Manuel have been chosen as delegates for their respective groups to attend the meeting.

Hatch fall injures man

A Butedale man is under observation in hospital today following an accident in the coastal community about 130 miles south of Prince Rupert.

Ernie Pagura apparently fell about eight feet into a hatch Tuesday morning.

He was flown to Prince Rupert about 1:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Officials at Prince Rupert General Hospital describe his condition as satisfactory. It is not known at present if he has any injuries.

Further details were not available.

Gillnetter entered

A gillnetter docked at Fairview was broken into over the weekend but there was apparently no loss.

RCMP said that equipment and various articles on the vessel, owned by Marc Cavenalle of 301 Third Avenue East, were scattered around but there was no damage.

Prince Rupert has now gone 800 days without a fatal traffic accident.

WEATHER

Cloudy with a few showers. Not much change in temperature. Light winds. Low tonight and high tomorrow 50 and 62.

TIDES

Thursday, July 6, 1961
(Pacific Standard Time)

High	08:00	16.8 feet
	20:38	19.5 feet
Low	02:06	6.4 feet
	14:10	6.8 feet