

Early Days on Kirkbride Road

In the 1920's, the area where Kirkbride Elementary School now stands was a forest of tall trees. There were open spaces where the alder trees and ferns and blackened stumps were reminders of early forest fires. Small wild animals and a few deer and bears roamed the woods. Around the edges of the forest, several small clearings and houses showed where hardy pioneers were carving out homes for themselves and their families.

Life was very different and difficult when an early pioneer named Neal Martin Kirkbride cut a trail back into the woods. He started from a two lane gravel road called Townline Road (now 96th Avenue). Deep in the forest, he measured off a five acre parcel on which to build a house and raise six Kirkbride children and assorted goats, cows, chickens, pigs, cats and dogs. That trail eventually became Kirkbride Road, now 122nd Street. Most of the lumber for the house, along with a minimum of furniture and supplies were hauled over the trail on a large horse-drawn sled called a stone boat. Some of the material for the house, such as hand sewn cedar shakes, were cut from logs on the site.

There was no electricity or running water so a "well" had to be dug by hand. It was just a hole in the ground four feet wide and eight feet deep, but it filled up and provided a supply of water. In the summer, the well would go dry and it was necessary to carry water from a spring on River Road. Rainwater was collected in a barrel to use for washing and watering the garden. Cooking was done on a wood-burning range, so any time free from hoeing the garden, clearing the land and looking after the animals, was occupied by cutting up poles or logs for firewood. The axes and saws were sharp and cuts were a common occurrence. Since the closest doctor was in New Westminster, and there was no way to get there, most cuts were treated at home with turpentine and iodine, and work went on.

The only elementary school in the area was Kennedy School, but it was in Delta at what is now 90th and Scott Road. Since there were only a few children in the Surrey area, they were allowed to attend Kennedy School. It was a two room school for grades 1-8 and had an outhouse. Each of the school rooms was heated by a wood-burning stove that stood at the back of the class. In order for his children to get to school, Neal Kirkbride cut a trail through the woods and across a swamp, to come out on Scott Road, near where 92nd Avenue crosses 120th Street (Scott Road). A generation of Kirkbride children ran and walked the trail to get an education.

As the years passed, and more people moved in, Kirkbride Road was widened and straightened, and pushed farther into the woods. Poles were erected along the road, bringing electricity to the settlers. It was many years later that running water became available.

Eventually more roads were built, more people moved into the area, and soon almost all the trees were gone. What evolved from this pioneer beginning is the community around you, and this beautiful *Kirkbride Elementary School*.

Glenn A. Kirkbride
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