

FRIENDS OF THE MORDEN MINE SOCIETY
CO-PRESEIDENTS' ANNUAL REPORT TO THE 2015 AGM

November 16th, 2015

At last year's AGM the latest and most comprehensive engineering report on the Morden tipple that has ever been undertaken (there have been five altogether) was presented by Jason Kinch of Read Jones Christoffersen (RJC). The RJC report, which cost approximately \$26, 500, was funded mainly by the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN), with contributions from the City of Nanaimo and our society. For the first time ever we were provided with a dollar amount to repair the main structures, and that amount, upwards of \$2.8 million, although staggering, did not come as a surprise. The Morden tipple, like that other important and once neglected iconic Vancouver Island heritage attraction, the Kinsol Trestle, had greatly deteriorated in recent years and the cost of repairs reflects what happens when a structure like this is neglected for so long.

If there is good news, it is that repairing the Morden tipple would cost less than half the amount that was needed to repair Kinsol. But the bad news is that part way into the RJC study, BC Parks for the very first time declared that it did not see Morden as a park it intended to support in any significant way or even to keep. Indeed, it declared in pronouncements to inquiring reporters, rather than to us -- ostensibly its partner under a formal agreement -- that it intended to divest itself of Morden one day and had made no provision for it in its current five-year budget plan. BC Parks also for the very first time refused to share in the cost of a major study at the park after a request to help fund the RJC study had been submitted by our BC Parks liaison. The minister chose to ignore a subsequent appeal that was addressed to her.*

Following the 2014 AGM we held a series of meetings with RDN officials in an effort to persuade them to do for Morden what the much smaller and less-well-endowed Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) had done for Kinsol, namely, step up to the plate in the face of the Province's indifference and put Morden on the infrastructure priority list. We made formal presentations in January and February of this year, outlining our request, citing the CVRD example, and providing a good deal of background information on why Morden is historically significant and well worth saving.** We also held a meeting with Mayor McKay of Nanaimo in an effort to persuade him to try and line up City Council support at the RDN (seven of the 17 RDN directors are members of City Council).

Unfortunately, our efforts fell short. The only interest expressed, and that by just two of Nanaimo's rookie councillors, was to provide funding to clear up the Morden site and prepare it for the major repair work that RJC stated was required "immediately." The cost of that preparatory work, as detailed in the RJC report, is about \$45, 000. We did not encourage the RDN to proceed in that direction, largely because it would be a waste of funds unless a commitment was made to fix Morden's structures. So discussion of the suggested action was deferred.

After the RDN had made it clear that Morden was not a priority, our board decided to circularize the membership to find out whether any of them wished FOMM to carry on and would be prepared to assist

the effort by joining the board. The response was not encouraging, to say the least, and with that the board decided to proceed towards winding up our society after one last major project at the park was finished.*** That project is to install a monument to memorialize all those who toiled in the old Vancouver Island coal mining industry and it is scheduled to be finished early next year.

Over the course of the summer we explored different possibilities for the monument and there's more on that below. At the same time we decided to put out one final newsletter and hold one last Black Track Tour – the latter to enable those had never taken the tour to have one last chance to do so. To our surprise there was a very strong response. Thirty-two members of the public turned up – some quite unexpectedly – while others had been advised that the tour was fully subscribed. As a result, we scheduled a second “final” tour to deal with the overflow and even with that a few still had to be turned away.

I would be remiss if I didn't note here that for ten years long-time heritage enthusiast, author, journalist, and vice-president of our board of directors, **Tom Paterson**, has journeyed from his home in Duncan to provide these popular fund-raising tours for us two or even three times each year. And throughout this decade he has been ably assisted by long-time member **Frances Christopherson**, who handled bookings, publicity and other administrative work for the tours. Frances, by the way, has also been our long-time newsletter editor and website editor.

As for the monument project, after exploring various options an informal planning group of the board decided to recommend a structure composed of a large piece of metamorphic stone, with plaque affixed, mounted on a reinforced concrete pedestal. The board subsequently endorsed this choice and elected four members of the informal planning group as a committee to see the project through to completion. If the winter proves to be reasonably dry and frost-free, the monument should be installed in January or February. Otherwise we'll wait for better weather in the spring.

As this is the last report under the co-presidency of John Hofman and myself, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those who've contributed greatly to our society and board over the past decade or so who were not mentioned above. In no particular order they are:

David Gogo, long-time FOMM president, who donated generously of his time to provide entertainment for our first major fund-raising effort. He also composed and performed a memorable song about the first PCCM mine (Morden's predecessor), in which his great-grandfather and 18 other miners were killed by a sudden flood. Two videos of that song may be viewed on the FOMM channel on YouTube along with several other video vignettes shot at Morden during the summer of 2012.

Helen Tilley, one of FOMM's founders and the principal developer of our website. Helen has maintained an active interest in the society over the years and made many valuable contributions to our understanding of the history of the Morden property as well as of the South Wellington area. A few years ago she hosted a reception for the grand-daughter of Grant Morden, after whom the mine site is named, and out of this came a great deal of information about Morden and his spectacular career as an early Canadian businessman and financier. An attempt is now being made to have his name included in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

Charles Christopherson, long-time corresponding secretary of FOMM and a keen researcher who provided us with a great deal of information about the history and use of reinforced concrete in mining and other structures.

John Hofman, long-time board member, our vice-president for a number of years, and my fellow co-president these past three years. John's professional engineering knowledge has proved invaluable as FOMM proceeded from one engineering study to another – there have been four in all sponsored or co-sponsored by our society plus one undertaken by BC Parks. John was also part of our delegation to then Minister of the Environment Terry Lake in 2012 and joined me for several additional presentations to local community and business groups as well as to local civic authorities.

Louise Shuker, our treasurer for the past several years, who's also been a vital part of our planning group for the monument project and previously for well-attended special events at Morden and at the Nanaimo Museum. She also designed and produced the park brochure (a project funded mainly by the RDN) and manages our geocache coin and lapel pin operation.

Ingrid Greenwell, long-time recording secretary and treasurer as well as our liaison with the South Wellington community association, Ingrid also volunteered her time generously for community outreach activities. She relocated to the lower mainland a few years ago.

Drew Chapman, our BC Parks liaison over two different time periods and for several years altogether, he's been a strong supporter of the park and our efforts to promote and develop it. Drew was instrumental in achieving National Historic Place status for Morden. He's currently a member of the monument project planning committee.

Dave Forman, previously a long-time BC Parks liaison. Dave gave Morden its first real boost of publicity within the government and for the general public by organizing one of BC Parks' 100th anniversary celebrations at Morden in 2011. He also arranged for the construction of the Miners' Trail and the installation of two of the park's three interpretation signs. And finally,

Judy Burgess, the principal founder of FOMM and its long-time president. Judy brought awareness of Morden to the general public and did much to develop FOMM as a significant society with a strong presence in the Nanaimo community.

Many of the above-named stalwarts of FOMM have also contributed articles to our newsletter and/or to the press and/or have made contributions to our website.

We also have members -- too many to mention individually – who have given generously of their time for a specific project or contributed one or more articles to our newsletter or served a short stint on the board. To them and to all others in the Nanaimo community who have supported us – especially the many reporters, editors and publishers of local media outlets who have promoted Morden's cause with vigour and even passion – I gratefully offer my thanks on behalf of our entire membership.

Eric Ricker

Co-president (and on behalf of my fellow outgoing Co-president, John Hofman)

*Copy of the letter to the minister is attached to the same e-mail message to which this report is attached.

** Copy of the final presentation to the RDN is likewise attached.

*** Subsequent to the events reported here we were approached by Sandra Larocq of Nanaimo with a proposal to keep FOMM operating. As a result of her interest, as of this year's AGM, a new board has been constituted with Louise Shuker and Sandra elected as co-presidents. Also, Chris Sholberg and David Dunaway, members of the outgoing board, agreed to stand for another term and were elected along with Sandra and three other new members who were recruited by Sandra.