

## A Brief History of Medical Care on Cortes Island

From about 1905, Health care on Cortes and other isolated islands was provided by the Columbia Coast Mission of the Anglican Church. The Mission operated on many isolated communities, logging camps and First Nations villages using a variety of vessels including the 35 ft M.V. Rendezvous in the 40's and the M.V. Columbia III, launched in 1956.



Rev. Rollo and Kathleen Boas crewed the Rendezvous. Kathleen was the only graduate nurse within the area served by the Mission. Rollo preached, and religious and medical services were provided on board when this was appropriate. For more serious cases, patients were transported to the hospital in Campbell River. These trips took days and many victims of accidents did not survive the experience.

In 1946, the clinic on Cortes was organized in the Boas' residence. Missionary doctors and dentists traveled to the clinic once a month to provide treatment. The first were Dr. N.B. Hall and Dr. R.S.R. Rose and Dr. Hall's nurse, Mrs V.D. Rundgren. When extra visits were required, Dr. Hall came from Campbell River by water taxi, across Quadra by land taxi and was picked up at Heriot Bay by Rev. Boas and the Rendezvous and transported to Cortes.

In the early 50's the founder of the Mission, Rev. John Antle, persuaded his church to fund the building of four new clinics in the region. The Whaletown medical-dental clinic, named the John Antle Memorial Clinic, was financed by donations from Women's Auxiliaries of B.C. and other church organizations and was built, largely by volunteer labour, near the St. John the Baptist Church which had been built some ?? years previously. The clinic was officially opened on Thursday, November 8, 1951, with the Boas' in residence. Kathleen addressed the gathering, thanking those who had contributed to the establishment of the clinic.

At this period, the clinic was serving a population of some 250 families on Cortes (65 in Whaletown) and 300 families on Read Island. It is also interesting to remember that contact between villages on Cortes was by boat. The trip from Mansons Landing to the clinic was a 35 minute trip.

The clinic building was also used for a variety of social gatherings from motion pictures to Sunday school, to meetings of the Women's Auxiliary of which Mrs. Boas was the first president.

By the late 50's, timber licenses were being awarded mainly to large companies at the expense of small operators and the population of Cortes decreased. The Columbia Mission was discontinued in the early 60's. From this time, the population of Cortes had to depend on islanders who had some medical experience to provide emergency medical care.

For a period during the early 60's, Mary Weiler served as dental nurse and her daughter Brig was cleaner. Doctors and dentists came to the island by boat and they were often late or their visits were cancelled due to bad weather. Mary was also called upon to deal with gunshot wounds, knifings and the like, when doctors were not available.

When Bernice McGowan arrived on Cortes in the mid 70's, there were 3 physicians who lived here more or less regularly, Ben Wong and Jock McKean from Cold Mountain and Anthony Raymont. None were interested in practicing medicine but were often pressed into service by default. To this end, there were one or 2 large plywood boxes of "medical supplies" like gauze, tourniquets, oxygen masks etc. which could be carried to "the scene" as necessary.

Around 1980 Anthony Raymont opened a medical practice out of his house which was the "Old Gorge Store" at the east end of the Gorge. The building later became the Bailey residence and burned down a few years ago. Dr Raymont practiced for a year or two, then left the island.

Dr. Cathal Stritch, his wife Deirdre and their son had come to the island, so when Dr. Raymont left, Dr Raymont "bequeathed" the boxes of medical supplies to Dr. Stritch, who bought property nearby around the same time.

Though Dr Stritch continued to go off island every six weeks to do locums on Vancouver Island, he decided that he needed a clinic on Cortes Island. A room was found at the Mansons Community Hall. The clinic was in the tiny room with no running water beside the post office. The examining table was built by the doctor (he was quite proud of that) and any equipment was scrounged from anywhere possible. Deirdre did the billing and made appointments in the morning before the clinic opened for patients.

Unfortunately, there was no ambulance yet and Cathal had some pretty hair raising trips to Campbell River by boat.

Sometime around 1983 Ruth Riddell, Wendy Knutsen and Bernice, who was not a nurse at this time, took an Industrial First Aid course in Campbell River . When Dr Stritch learned of this he wanted the three to be available to help him in emergencies. He also had the idea that if something was organized on a volunteer basis, eventually the Ministry of Health would start supporting it in terms of equipment at the very least.

The four had met only a couple of times when, in 1984, Dr Stritch became ill with a brain tumour and could no longer work.

Dr. Philip Chambers, Dr. Claire Bigelow and Dr. Kennedy each came to Cortes once every two weeks. Dr. Stritch died in July 1987.

Shortly after that Cortes was once again without a doctor.

Anicca deTrey and Gloria Jorg were among the driving forces in the beginning of CEFAS (Cortes Emergency First Aid Service). They organized fundraisers to purchase first aid supplies and to finance first aid training.

The very first ambulance was Anicca's Volvo station wagon which could fit a stretcher in the back. In 1988, Paul Gurr came to Cortes and did the first on-island Industrial First Aid course for CEFAS. The first real ambulance was procured through the efforts of Sully Sullivan through his connections in the logging industry. It is said that it came from the Queen Charlottes.

Other names of early first aid folks are Roland Boudreau and Uli Steghaus. Trude Albright-Sweeny was also involved as she had actually worked on an ambulance before she moved to Cortes. Others were Julia Rendal and Liz Richardson are the last of the original 18 who took the Industrial First Aid Course. In the company of George Sirk, Bruce Campbell, Jean Fontaine, Yendor, Kelly ? and Gloria and Ruth Riddell. After a trial period the BC Ambulance was fully recognized.

Then CEFAS was eventually dissolved.

Ron Croda arrived on Cortes with his family in 1989. Ron was a licensed Doctor's assistant in the USA. His recollections follow.

"By early 1992 about 1/3 of my time was tied to medical matters. We had purchased the home of the last physician to reside on Cortes Island and it was known that I had some medical experience. People arrived at our doorstep at all hours with medical problems, but particularly after minor accidents after the last ferry. It was evident very soon that relatively few medical problems were addressed by the fortnightly visits of a doctor. Many of the problems were at odd times and required evacuation not for their complexity, but because there was no triage (sorting) or medical capability on the island. At the other end of the scale, medical attention was often delayed by islanders in no hurry to make the expensive, time consuming trip to town until forced to do so by some crisis."

"Evacuations by Coast Guard Cutter or helicopter and extended hospitalizations are very expensive, besides being a poor way to deliver care. In fact, I did a little survey to discover that if we added together all of the costs associated with poor access to care, Cortes Islanders cost an amount about equal to the cost of a full time doctor salaried by the Province of BC. Another study done by Ministry of Health showed that Cortes Islanders were getting their medical care all over BC. This vital service was terribly fragmented."

"The island needed and could justify its own doctor."

"But there was no clinic, and "with no clinic, there is no doctor" was the way it seemed to work."

"I was contacted about this time by Dr. Phil Foster who wanted to live and work on Cortes Island. In the previous months representatives of the various island community

associations and the Klahoose First Nation had met and formed the Cortes Community Health Association (CCHA). This group became a society, incorporated under the Society Act of BC. The meetings were usually at the home of Ruth and Fred”

“Now we had a physician who was interested in coming. There was still much to do before Phil could move to the island. We (the Association, the Regional Director, Ralph Nursall, Phil, and I) began to lobby the Ministry of Health (MOH) armed with my study and other statistical sources. When we went in person to Victoria we found a sympathetic ear in Lea Hollins, then manager of the Alternative Payments Branch of the MOH, and the manager of Facilities and Planning for MOH. His name escapes me at this moment, but I will never forget his charming Scottish accent.”

“I called him because we needed a real clinic, and not the two bare rooms presently available. I explained in clear terms what our proposition was: We could only get a doctor if we had a clinic. He replied with equal clarity: “We have a ‘broken boiler fund.’ If we don’t break a boiler in the next 10 days (we were near the end of the fiscal period) it is yours.” Sweet sounds to my ears and he was as good as his word. In due time a check arrived for around \$35,000 and we built the first clinic, placing it under the management of the Health Association. An additional benefit dinner (Suzanne Minogue donated her services) and an appeal for funding raised another \$8,000 or so.”

Ron along with Ruth Zwickel, Lorena Teames, Liz Richardson and Kathy Cambridge were the founders of the CCHA. Ron resigned and David Hiatt took on the huge job of finding a Doctor when Dr. Foster left. Dr. Kirstie Overhill from the Sunshine Coast was his replacement.

It soon became clear that the rooms in the Mansons Hall were inadequate. There were questions of space and privacy and the need to have treatment facilities. The CCHA undertook to create a health centre. The Cortes Island Seniors Building Society owned a lot on Beasley Road and they leased part of that property to the CCHA. This was very conveniently close to emergency services (Ambulance, Fire Hall and Helipad) the school, and the Mansons Community Centre and the Seniors were making tentative plans to build seniors housing on the rest of their property.

The proposal was to build a Health Centre which would serve the needs of the Cortes community for a number of years and which could be added to when the need arose. This would require a daunting amount of money so development of building plans and fundraising begun.

The building was designed by the Cortes Community Health Association volunteers with the guidance of David Rousseau over a two year period with substantial public input. The committee decided to build a facility that would serve the island for decades, provide a comfortable and supportive atmosphere for users, and be durable and inexpensive to maintain.

The construction was done almost entirely by Cortes Island contractors and trades,

with a great deal of donated time and materials.

The building is engineered to be resistant to earthquakes and extreme storms, and has fire resistant exterior finishes. It also has complete backup systems that will operate all essential functions in a power outage.

The Health Centre building (Phase I) was designed to house our physician, a laboratory, a dispensing pharmacy, two examination rooms, and a treatment room for office procedures and emergency use. It would also be used on a regular basis by provincial mental health and public health services offered through the Vancouver Island Health Authority. Phase II, which we expect to be able to build in the next few years, will house complementary health practitioners who wish to serve Cortes residents and who meet the CCHA qualifications. It will also have a classroom for health related programs.

Some of the features of the building are:

- Framed and finished almost entirely with Cortes Island wood products
- Shatter resistant glass
- High thermal insulation and energy efficient windows
- Low energy lighting throughout
- In floor, hot water heating for comfort
- Automatic exhaust ventilation system for indoor air quality
- Operable windows in every room and opening skylights for summer comfort
- Commercial quality flooring, doors, plumbing and electrical systems
- Alarm system
- 2160 sq.ft Phase I,
- 900 sq.ft. Phase II (proposed)

The cost of the project, including new equipment and furnishings, would be close to \$300,000. Many members of the community participated in bake sales, raffles, solicitation of donations from friends on- and off-island. The Klahoose Band gave a fundraising concert which resulted in a donation of \$2000. And there was our marvelous calendar for which members of the community posed tastefully in the nude to be photographed by Richard Trueman. The July lady was Kathleen Boas who decades earlier was one of the pioneer missionaries who looked after the health of Cortesians. Her picture occupies a place of honour in the waiting room of the Centre. Calendars were sold to islanders and to friends and tourists from off island, sent to friends all around the world, and sold in bookstores and in the hospital in Campbell River. In all, about \$28,000 was raised from calendar sales.