

15. Career at Columbia Cellulose Co. Ltd at Prince Rupert, B.C.



This aerial photo is from Global earth and shows the site with the Sulphate Mill constructed on the right. The Sulfite Mill is at the left and the Wood Rooms and Power Plant are behind with the chip yards at the rear. I was able to visit the mill in 2014 with Rick and my daughter Lori Woodhouse. It was a "sentimental journey".

a. Project Engineer

I was given this title and provided the opportunity to do all types of mill projects as maintenance. Every time there were construction contractors brought in for various projects, I was designated as Mill Engineer to work with all the design Engineers which were usually H.A Simons Engineers out of Vancouver. I met many Engineers and contractors in the Industrial setting which afforded me a substantial experience in Pulp Mill construction and operations.

It was in Prince Rupert that I experienced the International Construction Unions as all work at the Mill was designated "union".

In one instance I had to locate a camp for workers on Watson Island (the location of the Mill) for about 40 workers. Of course, it was to the standard of the day when two workers stayed in each room and there was a centralized washroom area with toilets and showers.

There were "rumblings" that the camp was not up to the union standards and one morning I encountered a procession of taxi drivers leaving the gate (there were always 2 security personnel at the gate). I asked the Security people what was going on and heard that there was a problem at the camp.

I had a special Engineering Construction Trailer just outside the Bleach Plant that was used to administrate construction in the plant and as I arrived there, I found about four (4) Union Reps waiting for me. I was soon informed that water had frozen to the washrooms and a whole list of deficiencies in the camp was presented to me that was about 60 items long. So, all the workers decided that they needed to have the "best accommodation" (as required by Union Regulations) available in the area which was the newly constructed Crest Motel in downtown Prince Rupert eleven (11) miles from the mill and proceeded to move out of the camp.

I sat down with the Reps, and we went through the list item by item, and they noted that the beds were 2" too short as per the Plumbers Union Agreement and the dining room tables were 1" too narrow and also 2" too short to qualify for 30" for each person at the table. The list went on from there with the most significant being the quality of food.

So, I advised the Reps that I would deal with all the deficiencies right away by getting carpenters and welders to make changes where required. They hesitated and then "what about the quality of food?" I heard in unison.

"How would you like me to test that out?" I countered.

"Well, we will wait in your office until 4:30 and then take you in the back door of the dining trailer for dinner and you will see," they suggested.

"Sure, that is fine," I agreed.

So off to the back door of the dining room trailer we went (as they had earlier agreed to return to camp if I had committed to make all amends).

The scene was about 6 tables where 3 workers could sit on either side while the cooks would bring all the prepared goods to each table allowing everyone to help themselves as they wished from a serving plate.

I watched the next table as 8 T-bone steaks were delivered, and one worker took 3 unto his plate and cut out the tender part nearest the bone and then dumped the rest on the floor. I noted that he looked like "death warmed over" from heavy drinking. His next move was to take the full coffee pot, walk to the rear door and heave it out into the snow while muttering "This god damn dish water".

Well, I never ate so well, and the coffee was just excellent as I excused myself and said that we would meet in the morning and go over the entire complaint list.

We assembled in my office trailer, and I spoke first with "that man who desecrated the steaks and pitched the coffee pot does not deserve a job nor the hospitality of Columbia Cellulose and must be on the plane home this morning!" Then I added, "I got all the beds extended and tables improved so now I want to know what is the real problem here!"

Reluctantly, they slowly offered that they were embarrassed to bring booze past the guards and so the reason to be closer to beer parlors and liquor stores.

"Well, why did you not tell me this earlier," I responded. "We will just get buses to leave the camp at 6:00 P.M. and at 7:00 to go downtown and return at 9:00 and 1000 respectively. That should handle the majority of the needs, I believe!"

"Will you do that?" they asked in unison. "Of course," I answered "this is as necessary as toilet paper in the washrooms!"

That is how we handled that situation.

There was much more as Prince Rupert was the last place anybody from the Union Halls wanted to go and so we were rewarded with the bottom of the list and the results were predictable.

This may have influenced my future dealings with the unions as later encountered.

b. *House at Prince Rupert*

Located at 329 - 7th Avenue, Prince Rupert. When we moved in late May 1963, the house was owned by Mrs. Knutson who rented it out to the company to assist with the housing crisis at that time. Mrs. Hurst, a teacher, was renting an upstairs bedroom (window facing 7th Avenue) and we had to agree to allow her to stay until the school year was over at the end of June.

Bob Miller and Fred Trotter were two student Engineers, that had summer jobs but nowhere to stay so Marilyn ended up being a land lady that summer for Room and Board. Somehow this house became the social place for all the new Engineers and soon Ron and Elaine Ross were frequent guests along with Jim Holloway and a group of Engineers that stayed in a house but seemed attracted to this crowd. Many happy memories that would take a book to mention and all very clear in my mind.



Nona was almost 2 years of age when the family moved to Prince Rupert.

The house was located on the South side of 7th Avenue.

Picture was taken at the rear of the house.

Nona enjoying a brief day of sunlight. Those time were few as the average rainfall is 96 inches a year.

One day Ron Ross (who was very hairy) was sitting by front picture window on a chesterfield and Nona came up to him and started stroking his arm and muttered "Ruff, Ruff"! Ron never forgot that and always brought the subject up with 'Nonie' as he lovingly called her.

Although Lori was conceived in Saskatoon, she also spent her first year and a half living in this house.



In 1963 there was a picket fence around the house and along 7th Avenue.

There was a gate in the picket fence at the left with a concrete sidewalk from there to the house and then along the house.

The wooden deck was added since we lived there.

This photo was taken from Google Earth in 2018.

Gramps and Granny Verishine came by train from Saskatoon as did Baba Verigin to visit us. We went for a drive with Baba, and she bought two ice cream cones for Nona and Lori who were sitting with her in the back seat of our 1965 Valiant. Lori finished her cone first and decided that Nona was not eating hers fast enough and snatched it out of her hand. Well, the ruckus that followed makes me laugh now but was a bit testy at that time.

Gramps and Uncle Bill drove out in the Spring of 1965 to visit as well as try and convince Elmer to reconsider his decision to leave the Pulp Mill.

Tamara was conceived in this house in Prince Rupert.

c. Company Representative on all Expansion Construction at existing Sulfite Mill

My designation as the Company Representative on the Sulfate Mill that started construction in December 1964 was quite an honor and came from the earned respect that I had received from my supervisory Engineers.

The Human Resources department offered Marilyn and I a new house that would be constructed to our specification and choice of design. Again, my belief in honesty caused me to advise them that Marilyn and I did not want to own a house. I did not advise them at that time that our plans were to leave Prince Rupert. House prices went up very quickly after 1965 and we missed an excellent opportunity to make a capital gain.

Well, we are able to hold our heads high!

d. Assistant Manager of Construction of new Sulfate Mill with special attention to the fresh water and dam construction

This designation came to me in February 1965. It was great to have helicopters take me over the planned water collection areas which included a Dam and large diameter wood stave pipe that would be about 10 miles long. I never even realized that I was a "big shot", but my mind was on preparing to leave for Trail, B.C.

e. Sports at Prince Rupert

Living in Prince Rupert at that time was very interesting. It seemed that everyone was friendly.

Our special friends in this next picture became social, work and sports friends that remain to this day except we lost Ron and Jim.



Left to Right:

Jim Holloway (Civil), Bob Miller (Mechanical), Elmer Verigin (Civil) and Ron Ross (Electrical) Engineers.

We became a team in Fishing, Curling as well as at the Engineering Office.

Our curling team won the Prince Rupert Marine Bonspiel with Bob skipping, Elmer playing Third, Ron at Second and Jim at Lead.

Sid Corbett, the assistant Steam Engineer owned a 22' yacht which became a regular event for fishing, crabbing, and hunting.

f. Resignation to leave for Verigin family Adventure

In early April, my common sense of fairness, caused me to call a meeting with my senior Engineers to advise them that I was leaving at the end of April 1965. It was a difficult time for all of us as I had become a "company man" by this time and so it was difficult for both sides.

See my blog at [https://elmerverigin.wordpress.com/Elmer's Diary Notes on Pulp Mill at Prince Rupert](https://elmerverigin.wordpress.com/Elmer's%20Diary%20Notes%20on%20Pulp%20Mill%20at%20Prince%20Rupert)

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