

## HISTORY OF SENIORS HOUSING PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN BY B.C. DOUKHOBORS

The idea of developing seniors housing for Doukhobors originated at a Canadian Doukhobor Society Annual Meeting at Salmo about 1967. The independent Doukhobors had invited representatives from the Reformed Doukhobor and Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ to discuss this agenda item. It was consequently agreed to investigate the feasibility of constructing seniors housing units that would be available to all Doukhobors in need of same.

I do not have the minutes of this meeting and cannot confirm whether a society named Doukhobor Benevolent Society (DBS) was constituted at the meeting or soon thereafter but some of the Directors were John J. Verigin, Pete Oglow, Pete Bloodoff, Pete Popoff and others. Ken Konkin from Vancouver was the designated founding, President.

### 1. PARKSIDE VILLA, (26 UNITS) GRAND FORKS, B.C.

In the early 1980s, a proposal was submitted to B.C. Housing (BCH) in Cranbrook, to develop a seniors housing project in Grand Forks. The DBS contacted an Engineer, Elmer Verigin to prepare drawings for such a proposal on a site chosen on the southerly portion of downtown Grand Forks. As I recall the land cross-section sloped high on the westerly side and low on the easterly side.

Elmer Verigin recommended a Swiss Architect, Pafford Clay, to develop a suitable design. The Architect recommended a sloped design so that the window wall would face Southwest to provide passive energy for the housing unit. The low wall would be positioned to the high side (bank). This suited the property very well.



The application was submitted to BCH and approval was received to proceed to acquisition of a site.

The site chosen required zoning change and so a public meeting was required to proceed with the zoning change. The public meeting was not in favour of the proposal and so a new site was needed.

BCH approached the City with a firm request that a site was needed right away otherwise the project would be moved to the Doukhobor Community Center site on the outskirts of Grand Forks. The city responded by allocating a site on the former airport site. Unfortunately, the unit designs did not suit a level site, but BCH would not amend the budget for an alternate design. The DBS opted to accept the site with the Architect orientating the buildings for the maximum energy efficiency as in the current construction.



This 26-unit project went to tender with a local General Contractor, Bill Pepin being the successful tenderer.

Dennis Chernoff, a mortgage broker from Vancouver was able to find a mortgage, guaranteed by BCH and construction proceeded. During the construction, the working Directors were the “**TRIPLE PETES**” as I respectfully nicknamed them: *Pete Oglow, Pete Bloodoff* and *Pete Popoff*.



The DBS held an opening ceremony in the summer of 1982 at the site located at 2450 – 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Grand Forks, B.C.

The project was administered by the DBS until the 25-year mortgage was paid. A few years later, the DBS volunteers decided to return Parkside Villa to the total administration by BCH ever since.

The Reader may appreciate that there were many difficulties to overcome on this first seniors project attempted by the DBS but listing all the negative events is not the objective of this article.

## **2. ROSEWOOD MANOR, (10 UNITS) CASTLEGAR, B.C.**

The Doukhobor Cultural Association (DCA) was actively searching for a project and thus were encouraged by the DBS to develop a Seniors project in Castlegar. The group travelled though the Okanagan inspecting constructed seniors’ projects for ideas and to understand the concept.

An enquiry was presented to BCH in Cranbrook with a response that no funding for Castlegar was available at this time. In mid 1980s, BCH made contact that if the DCA / DBS could expedite a project that they could consider ten (10) units.

The Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ had recently disposed of their Prayer Hall and an acceptable sale price for the land was negotiated for a senior’s project.

A proposal call resulted in Tri-City Contracting Ltd., from Kamloops submitting a Design /Build proposal to suit this site located at 1008- 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Castlegar.



The administration was undertaken by the DCA but the ownership was under the DBS. The DCA became members of the DBS.

On completion of construction, the operation continued under the DCA administration for the DBS.



### 3. WHITE BIRCH MANOR (48) UNITS, DELTA, B.C.

Three (3) DCA families moved to the Lower Mainland in the mid 1980s and the prospect of a senior's project on the Lower Mainland was a result of an accidental discussion with an Architect who was actively involved in designing seniors' projects throughout British Columbia. He revealed that one of the difficulties that he often encountered was assembling projects for Developers who owned property and were capable to develop seniors' projects, lacked a non-profit society to qualify for an application to BCH for when they advertised for Seniors Housing Proposal Calls.

Lawrence Popoff and Elmer Verigin responded to an invitation from this Architect to meet a Developer who had property in North Delta. Both Lawrence and Elmer had not discussed this matter with anyone prior to that time but agreed to meet the Architect and Developer. An understanding was reached that if we could connect, the Architect, Developer, and a non-profit society, that the Developer and Architect would create the drawings and application to BCH as a financial risk to the proponents but not to the non-profit society. Upon completion of the short meeting, Lawrence and I discussed how a Society would be created.

We immediately proposed that the DBS could undertake this challenge with a branch on the Lower Mainland and local Doukhobor Seniors who had an organization known as the Lochdale Hall (not sure of the actual name but Doukhobors from all over Western Canada who became resident on the Lower Mainland, chose to participate together). We also talked to Nick and Maxine Ozeroff and Peter and Elsie Rezansoff and agreed to meet with the Lochdale group and suggest that be come members for a proposal for a seniors housing project somewhere on the Lower Mainland. They agreed to such an objective.

Then we made contact with the DBS and they agreed that the constitution could be loaned to a separate society and thus the Lower Mainland Doukhobor Benevolent Society (LMDBS) was constituted and registered as per the Societies Act in British Columbia.

The newly formed Society then elected Directors that included: Peter and Elsie Rezansoff, Nick and Maxine Ozeroff, Lawrence and Kathy Popoff, Helen Peters, Peter Savinkoff, Mabel Chernoff and others to the first legal membership and directorship. The LMDBS was ready to execute any submission to BCH for a project,



There was a process which Fred Minty from the Developer guided us through and the application for 48 units for 11905 – 80<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Delta was marginally rejected. An appeal by the society to BCH along with a strong support of the President of the local North Delta Seniors Association, finally was accepted by BCH.

The LMDS administered and operated the project . It also became meeting place for the Doukhobors in the Amenity Room.

Here again there is an interesting story, when the project was completed with about \$40,000 surplus funds remaining. BCH requested the funds

but the LMDBS Lawyer, Peter Faminoff had already placed it in his Trustr Account. Negotiations took place and a strong position by Peter Rezansoff (who was a large General Contractor on the Lower

Mainland, asked BCH the question “how many projects has the BCH been associated with that were completed under budget?”

The result was that the LMDBS was able to purchase furniture for the Amenity Room as well as equip the kitchen and dining room.

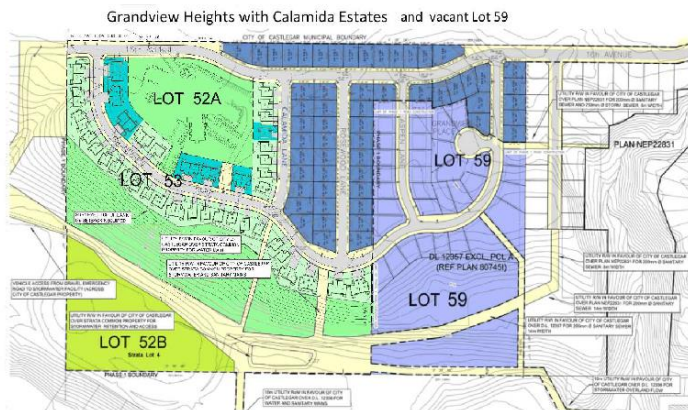
The LMDBS has now negotiated with the New Vista Society to continue operating White Birch Manor after February 2024.



#### 4. GRANDVIEW (49 UNITS), CASTLEGAR, B.C.

The DCA was involved in another project, the Whatshan Lake Retreat at Whatshan Lake at 645 Whatshan Lake Forestry Road. All the DCA members met at Blue Lake Retreat and decided that they wanted to develop a full seniors retirement community. To this end they contributed \$50,000 for a feasibility study as well as perspective Architectural drawings.

After researching twenty (20) possible sites, the Grandview site was chosen.



The DBS was not involved but the DCA constituted the Kootenay Columbia Seniors Housing Cooperative (KCSHC) with immediate interest in the 49 entry level seniors’ units. The entire project is outlined in detail in



Elmer Verigin Blog as “Seniors Speak from the Ledge” for those Readers that are interested to know more on that story. The single-story design is shown in the adjacent photo.

A senior’s complex was part of the “Aging in Place” concept and was given a name Grandview Place but was not developed to reasons outlined in the suggested blog story.



The current development status is shown in this google map.

In conclusion, the Writer offers these comments for interest pf the Readers:

- The original intent of providing seniors accommodation in the 1960s was proposed by second generation Doukhobors after migration from Russia to Canada
- This “mission” was essentially recognized by third generation Doukhobors and brought to fruition.
- There were just a few actual Doukhobor residents in the first three (3) public projects
- The fourth generation of Doukhobors do not recognize the need for volunteers to administrate and operate these projects and so the first three (3) projects have been reverted to BCH after the 25-year mortgages have been paid and the DBS does not exist.
- The KCSHC and DCA do not exist, and a Grandview Strata administers the Grandview Housing where just a few Doukhobors now own about eight (8) of the 49 units.



This is the story of Doukhobor seniors’ projects in British Columbia. Those of us who became interictally involved with the projects were rewarded with development success.

*Written by EWV December 12, 2023*