

Notary Charles Ellington (Retired): Orphanage to Government House

I usually start my life story by saying, “I was raised in a 40-room mansion with a cook, two nannies, and a gardener. Our home was set on 13.5 acres, with a commanding view of the Capital City of Victoria.” It sounds wonderful till I explain it was the BC Orphanage.

My sister carried me in the front door of the “Home” when I was 3. I remained in care until I was 16, except for a period of just over a year when I was 10. My mother’s health had improved somewhat and I was allowed to go home. For the first time in my life I knew what it was to have parental affection. My mother’s health subsequently deteriorated and she went back into hospital. I was sent back to the Orphanage.

My father had been born in England. He came to Canada in the early part of the 20th century and went overseas to fight in WWI with a Winnipeg regiment. Wounded in the battle of Vimy Ridge and the battle of the Somme in France, my father was shipped out to London, England, where he contracted rheumatic fever and was sent back to Canada.

On returning to Winnipeg, he discovered my mother was in very poor health, so on advice from the family doctor, the family moved to Victoria. It was the late ‘20s; my father could not find work in spite of the fact that he had had a CPR job before the war. He had seven mouths to feed and no income. So he went to downtown Victoria, threw a rock through a jewellery store window, and waited for

the police. He did not steal anything; he just wanted to draw to the attention of the authorities that he had a crisis on his hands. The Orphanage decided to help. My eldest brother and sister went in first, then my other two siblings, and finally me.



Frances Limnan Photography, Victoria

It must have been very hard for my mother to see her youngest and last of her children leave home. Because I was situationally “disturbed,” I refused to eat, especially their lumpy porridge. The concerned matrons tried to force-feed me and I rebelled, which led to frustration and nightmares. The matrons were compassionate and caring registered nurses who cared for hundreds of children and won the respect of the community year, year after year.

At age 16, I went out into the world to find my way. At first I lived with my father in a room he had rented. All he had in the world was a bed, a table, two chairs, and a bureau. Then I lived for a while in a slum hotel in downtown Victoria.

A big influence in my life was the little church where the children from the “Home” went to Sunday School. It was known as Oaklands Gospel Hall. The members of that little church took an interest in me, encouraging me to study the *Bible* and participate in the teaching and preaching ministries of the church.

I dropped out of high school after grade 9 and went to work as a shoe repairer’s apprentice for three years. The Sunday School superintendent of the little church offered me a job in his accounting office with the federal government. I should have had high school graduation to qualify, but because I passed the government exams, I was given the job.

I soon discovered junior clerks in the provincial government were making \$110 per month; I was only getting \$100. I applied to the BC government for a position that also should have had a high school graduation requisite, but passed the exams and was placed in the Land Title Office in 1948. I worked there until 1956, which gave me a good grounding in land law.

In the mid ‘50s, I was invited to sit on the Board of the Orphanage where I was raised. I was subsequently asked to

accept the position of Secretary of the Orphanage Board. I sat on the Board for 25 years and was President for five.

During my tenure as President, I was concerned we were not meeting the real needs of the community because of the diminishing need for an orphanage. Because there were few real orphans, the orphanage had deteriorated into a babysitting service for tired moms who needed a break.

But there was a need for some kind of service to single-parent families. All over the city, single moms were living in attics, basements, and garages. We decided to build some low-rental housing units on the Orphanage property, and invite women to come live with their children instead of abandoning them to us. We created a new concept called the Cridge Centre for the Family—named after Bishop Cridge, the first dean of the Cathedral—and phased out the children living in the old home. If they were without parents, we housed them in group-

living homes, which we also built. If one of their parents was available, we invited them to live with their child or children on our premises, in one of our low-rental units.

The idea took off like a rocket, and has continued to be in great demand. We now have a \$3 million budget with 150 workers and several venues.

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They include a home for women escaping family violence, and a home for men who have sustained head injuries. We continue the day care, and are always on the look-out for ways we can serve families in Victoria. The Vanier Institute took an interest in what we were doing because they thought it was so unique and creative.

For almost five years, from 1956 to 1960, I worked at Royal Trust Company doing Wills and estates. During that time, I was invited by Notary J. Arthur Wild to apply for a vacant Notary Seal in Victoria. Alex Matthew, Secretary of The Society of Notaries Public of BC, asked me to attend the Notary convention in Harrison Hot Springs in the Fall of 1958.

When I was appointed a Notary in 1958 at 30 years of age, I was the youngest Notary in the province. When my son was appointed as a Notary in 1980, age 22, he was the youngest Notary in the province.

The Notary firm I purchased from Mr. Wild has been functioning as a Notary Office continually since 1917. I completed 43 years of service in my profession; I believe that at the time, I was the longest-serving Notary in the province.

During my career as a Notary Public, I had the privilege of acting for the Minister of Public Works in the Social Credit government, one of many high-

Editor's

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profile clients for whom I acted, including some lawyers. I had a very busy Notary practice with as many as eight staff.

I was appointed by a Provincial Cabinet appointment to the Board of the Housing Corporation of British Columbia, the former Dunhill Corporation—a major construction firm the NDP government of David Barrett had purchased. They intended to use this company to build public housing.

When Bill Bennett won the election in 1975, the government changed the name to the Housing Corporation of BC. After some years of criticism from the public, and abuse from Vancouver talk shows, the government closed it down. But not before I attended a Cabinet Meeting in the Parliament buildings in Victoria, along with the other Directors, to explain to the Cabinet what we were all about. When the Housing Corporation was closed down, the Board was entertained by a dinner at Government House with the Lieutenant Governor. Attending a Cabinet Meeting and having dinner with the Lieutenant Governor were two exceptional experiences.

Over the years, I handled in excess of 20,000 real estate deals; drew thousands of Wills; administered hundreds of estates where I was executor; signed a zillion affidavits, Statutory Declarations, passports, etc., etc., etc.

As a Notary, I looked forward to going to work every day. The fact that I was a Notary meant I was widely respected in the community; that opened doors of opportunity to lecture on Wills and estates and real estate matters. Overall I had a wonderful life. After all the years in practice, I was happy to turn the office over to my son Robert; I am proud of the way he has carried on.

Through the experience I gained in the Land Registry Office and the Royal Trust, and the many opportunities for educational seminars as a Notary, my education was greatly enhanced. I attended many Continuing Education seminars set up by the Law Society through the University of British

Columbia, attended seminars set up by The Society of Notaries, and subscribed to the *Western Weekly Reports*, a law journal that covered law cases of Interest in Western Canada. I summarized those cases for my files. The *WWR* reports were my way of "Reading the Law."

For 10 years, I lectured at the Victoria Real Estate Board on contract law. When they prepared a video to be used in that course, produced by some Vancouver lawyers, I discovered the cases I had been summarizing for my own use were the ones the lawyers were using in the video.

Charles Ellington married Elaine in August 2001; his first wife Kathleen died in December 1998. Son Robert Charles Ellington is a Victoria Notary Public; son Stephen Andrew Ellington is a sailmaker rigger at the naval dockyard in Victoria. Charles has two grandsons. Together with Elaine's nine grandchildren, they do enjoy a busy family life!

Voice: 250 477-7680
chas.ell@shaw.ca

Some of Charles' life accomplishments

1. Director, The Society of Notaries Public of BC
2. Director, Housing Corporation of BC (Cabinet appointment)
3. Founding Governor, Regent College Theological Seminary at UBC
4. Member, Mel Smith Scholarship committee, Trinity Western University
5. Founding Elder, Lambrick Park Church
6. Past President, Cridge Centre for the Family, oldest registered charity in BC, formerly the BC Orphanage
7. Toastmasters' Golden Gavel Winner
8. Board member, Kids Klub Society, largest day care centre in the city of Victoria
9. Member, Union Club of Victoria
10. Stamp collector, Canada and Jersey ▲