



Foundation Founder Ronnie Turner

The Turner Orchards Story

From the small orchard that existed on the land that young Irish immigrant Robert Turner purchased in 1895, the Turner orchards grew to extend over some 70 acres, from present day Ross Street up the hill to what is now 20th Street NE. Robert was a founding member of the Salmon Arm Farmers' Exchange, created in 1907 in order to allow local fruit growers to market and ship their fruit in an organized manner. At that time, apples from all the various orchards were mixed together and shipped loose in box cars, using only bedding straw as protection. The firm of R. Turner & Sons came into being in 1932, the result of a remark made by another apple grower that his 'apples didn't look bad when mixed with Turners.' This allowed Robert to have control over the packing and shipping of his fruit. In 1935 he purchased a small packing house operation from A.E. Palmer. Over the years the building was enlarged and a cold storage plant added. Several other large growers in the area also chose to ship through R. Turner & Sons, making this a more viable operation. In its peak year, 1946, 66 box car loads of fruit left Salmon Arm, to be delivered all over Canada, Great Britain, Australia, the West Indies, the Middle East, the United States and Brazil.

At some point early in the development of the orchards, a tree was discovered that always produced a solid red Delicious apple, rather than the striped variety. Robert propagated this variety, and because of its' attractive properties, it became famous as the 'Turner Red Delicious', becoming the Red Delicious of choice among growers throughout the Okanagan Valley.

In 1907 Robert married Maude Louise Maguire. They had four children – Edward Charles, Marjorie Eglah, Ronald Hudson, and Alexander Robert. All the children worked alongside their father in the orchards, and in the packing house. Robert died in 1950, Maude in 1979.

Turner Orchards cont'd Page 2

The Turner Orchards Story cont'd

When the killing cold of the winter of 1949/50 decimated the fruit industry, the Turner orchards were not spared. This, together with steadily rising production and labour costs as well as a dearth of seasonal labour to pick and pack the fruit, brought an end to the firm of R. Turner & Sons. The eldest son, Edward (Eddie), remained on the orchard and continued the operation on a much smaller scale until his death in 1971. Ronald (Ronnie) acquired employment with the Department of Highways, helping to build roads throughout southern BC and Vancouver Island.

Upon his retirement in 1977, Ronnie returned to Salmon Arm, moving into the house built for his mother and where he resides to this day. Ronnie is proud of the contribution his family has made to the community. Family pride shines through when he says his dad was a well-respected business leader in the community, and a fair employer. Ronnie says there wasn't a kid in town who didn't work for his dad while growing up during the 20s, 30s, and 40s. He also says his dad was a progressive thinker, having had the foresight to wire his new house for electricity before it was even available in Salmon Arm. Some of that progressive thinking was passed on to Ronnie, who became a Founder of the Shuswap Community Foundation in 1996. He is pleased he was able to help the foundation achieve a solid footing.

Ronnie was married in 1946 to June Gillis, a newly graduated nurse with roots in Sicamous who had moved to Salmon Arm upon accepting a position with the hospital here. They had three children, Robert, Glenna and Janice.

In 2009, Ronnie and his family established the Turner Orchards Endowment Fund, with grants from the fund to be distributed to a non-profit charitable organization in the Shuswap, at the discretion of the Shuswap Community Foundation.

Ronnie's philosophy is 'do the best you can – just carry on.' Today he still sells fruit off the trees on the two acres surrounding his home, including apples from a 90-year old Wealthy tree at the entrance to his driveway.

• Notes by Ineke Hughes May 2010 •