**Document 2: Ocean Falls Backgrounder Pt.2**

**A Brief History of Ocean Falls**

The community of Ocean Falls is located at the head of Cousins Inlet, near Bella Bella. The first known inhabitants of the area were the Kwakwa (Kwakiutl) and the Nuxalk (Bella Coola), and their seasonal village at the base of the falls was called "Liak" meaning falls.

The site has always been known for its overabundance of rainfall (172 inches annually), and it was the potential for easy access to large amounts of fresh water that prompted the first commercial interests to concentrate on the area. In 1903, the Bella Coola Pulp and Paper Company was surveying the area for timber and was impressed by the site. Inexpensive power could be generated from the enormous waterfall at the head of Cousins Inlet, and the water in the lake (Link Lake) above the falls was pure enough to be used in pulp making without filtration. The Company acquired the rights to 260 acres of land extending from Cousins Inlet to Link Lake and obtained the necessary leases from the provincial government.

In 1906 a crew of 25 men arrived by steamer, and began clearing the land for a townsite. By 1909, Ocean Falls was starting to take shape. A sawmill was in production, a store was built, school classes for 10 pupils were being held on the second floor of the store, and a one-bed hospital operated out of a small building on Front Street. By 1910, a bridge had been built over the river, rough roads were in place, a number of houses had been put up, and a hotel was being built. Construction of a pulp mill and a dam at the head of the falls was also underway. In 1911 the whole province, including Ocean Falls, was enjoying an economic boom.

The Company relied heavily on handloggers to supply them with logs. These men often worked alone, sometimes in pairs, felling trees in the woods and getting them down to the water for transport to the mill. Over time, skids, horses, a mechanical engine called a "donkey engine", and logging "railways" were all used get the logs out of the forest, but it was tough and dangerous work.

The pulp mill went into production in 1912, but by this time a recession was beginning. The timber holdings held by the Company turned out to be unsuitable for large scale operations, and in March 1913, Ocean Falls Company Limited went into receivership. In 1915, a new company, Pacific Mills Limited took over the operation. A large amount of equipment had already been brought in for existing mill, but the new Company was planning a state-of-the-art million dollar operation, and it sought access to large amounts of timber from the provincial government.

In 1916, the community needed improvements to support the people living there. A doctor was brought to the town, and a 25 bed hospital was built, and staffed with two nurses. The Company paid 50% of the cost for medical treatment for employees and their families. The school, closed in 1913, re-opened and a principal was appointed. By 1917, the face of the town had changed dramatically. A new fire hall, post office, customs building, and dock warehouse had been built. In order to house the new workers and their families, additional bunkhouses and apartments had been built by the Company.

World War One, created demand for strong but lightweight wood for the construction of airplanes. The sitka spruce of British Columbia's north coast was well suited for this purpose, and all available sawmills went into full production to meet the need. Work continued feverishly to get the new pulp mill into production. The first paper making machine, No. 3, was fired up on June 1st, 1917, and the newsprint began to roll out at a rate of 600 feet per minute. The war also created labour shortages, and Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian workers were brought into Ocean Falls to meet the demand.

By 1918, the celebration of Dominion Day demonstrated the strong sense of community that had already developed in Ocean Falls. Dominion Day would remain an important social event for the town. Also in 1918, the effects of the world-wide flu epidemic were minimized in Oceans Falls in part due to the isolation of the community, but also due to the Emergency Fund that was established to care for those individuals on the sick list.

Church services were initially held in the basement of the schoolhouse, and everyone was welcome to attend. The first church was built in 1921.

A wide range of social activities developed, and clubs of all sorts were formed. Band concerts and theatrical productions were given, and sports were popular, particularly baseball. Ocean Falls also had one of the finest swimming pools in British Columbia, and the town sent many champion swimmers to compete for Canada in the British Empire Games, the Pan-American Games, and the Olympics.

Through the depression years of the 1930s the mill fought for survival by cutting operating costs and wages, focusing on "efficiency" measures, and reducing overall production. By the late 1930s unions started to form at the mill. However, the Second World War brought increased demand for sitka spruce, which led to labour shortages since two hundred employees were serving in the Canadian armed forces. The mill also employed a large number of Japanese workers, who were now uprooted from their homes and jobs at Ocean Falls and sent to "internment" camps in the interior of the province.

The 1950s and 1960s saw continued growth and expansion in the community. This growth was interrupted by three major events; an industry-wide strike in 1957, and two disastrous landslides caused by rainfall that was excessive even for rainy Ocean Falls.

By the 1970s, the mill facilities at Ocean Falls were old, and the isolation of the site added to the costs of running the mill. In a move to cut costs and increase profits at other mills, the mill owner (now Crown Zellerbach), announced that the operations at Ocean Falls would be phased out by March of 1973. As operations gradually wound down, the community itself also started to erode. Jobs were being lost, people were moving away. and shops and businesses began to close.

However, two weeks before the impending closure of the mill, the provincial government stepped in and bought the entire town for a reported $1 million, and set up the Ocean Falls Corporation. No provision was made to secure a supply of timber for the mill through timber grants, so the new corporation was forced to buy logs on the open market adding to the costs. Though production remained high, profits decreased for various reasons including weak markets, rising cost of materials, machinery problems, labour unrest, and high interest loans. In early March of 1980, the government was forced to announce that the entire mill was to be closed within three months. On May 31, 1980 the mill at Ocean Falls was closed and the last employee left.

As the Ocean Falls Corporation was being dismantled, the equipment auctioned off, and buildings demolished, the community itself began to take more direct control over its future. Although there were just 50 residents, the Ocean Falls Improvement District was established. The community worked with the government to save 60% of the buildings in recognition of their historical value. By 1996 the number of residents had increased to 150 people; many attracted by the charm of the small town, it's quiet atmosphere, and unique heritage.

Sourced from the former BC Archives Time Machinehttp://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/index.htm