



Maintaining a Conservation Ethic

The Story of Haig-Brown House

Erika Anderson

In a quiet corner of Campbell River, where the gentle murmur of the river provides a constant soundtrack, an unassuming farmhouse on the bank of the river is preparing to wind down from its busy summer season and welcome a more subdued winter schedule.

The Haig-Brown House was built in 1923, and purchased in 1936 by Roderick and Ann Haig-Brown. Roderick Haig-Brown, who was recently designated a Person of National Historic Significance, was an author, a magistrate and a forward-thinking early pioneer of environmental conservation in Canada. His wife, Ann Elmore, was also an important member of the community as a librarian, intellectual, local activist and caregiver for women and children in crisis. They named their home Above Tide and used their 19

acre property to raise their four children, grow food, support livestock, and maintain a formal garden with an English-style lawn.

Roderick began showing an interest in conservation at an early age, but the environmental battles for which he is known took place after the war. In the early 1950s the British Columbia Power Commission proposed a dam that would flood Buttle Lake, located in Strathcona Park. Roderick presented arguments at hearings about the negative impacts of the dam, wrote articles about it for a Victoria newspaper, made radio appearances, and engaged many people in the fight, called the “Battle for Buttle”. He won a partial victory: a lower dam was built and less of the park was flooded. He also spoke out about the damaging impacts of DDT, condemned logging companies that were damaging streams, and fought against the Moran dam proposed for

the Fraser River. His strong, clear voice for preserving the natural environment had an influence that extended far beyond the boundaries of Campbell River.

“I have been, all my life, what is known as a conservationist. I am not at all sure that this has done myself or anyone else any good, but I am quite sure that no intelligent man, least of all a countryman, has any alternative. It seems clear beyond possibility of argument that any given generation of men can have only a lease, not ownership, of the earth; and one essential term of the lease is that the earth be handed on to the next generation with unimpaired potentialities. This is the conservationist’s concern.” - Roderick Haig-Brown, Measure of the Year (1950)

In 1975, the Haig-Browns sold Above Tide, including the majority of its contents, to the Province of BC as

Above: Haig-Brown House and formal lawn. HKY7621.
Photo credit: Lee Simmons

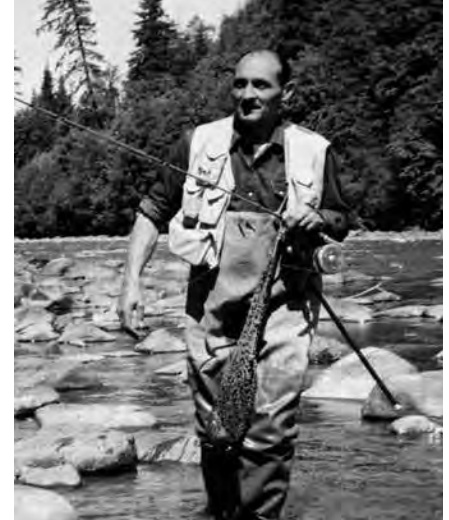


part of an initiative to preserve greenspace. Although the agreement did not include specifics about how the property would be used, the Haig-Browns did indicate they wanted the site to be used by deserving conservationists and writers and not to become a “hands off” heritage site.

In 1982, in recognition of the heritage importance of the site, 1.9 acres including the house and formal garden was transferred to the Heritage Branch. The remainder of the property stayed under the greenspace protection of the Province of BC. After the death of both Roderick in 1976 and Ann in 1990, one of the first steps undertaken by the Heritage Branch was public consultation that reconfirmed the desire to have the site utilized. Jenifer Iredale, who was at the time the Curator for the Coastal Okanagan Region of the Heritage Properties Branch, assisted by staff and volunteers of the Campbell River and District Museum, undertook an inventory of all

of the contents of the house and developed a strategy for managing the artifacts.

In 1994, the Heritage Branch called for proposals to operate the house. Kevin Brown was the successful proponent and was issued a Park Use Permit, a standard permit used by BC Parks and other Heritage Properties such as Barkerville and Fort Steele. Brown established a Bed & Breakfast and the Haig-Brown Education Centre. Over the coming years, he lived in the house and completed extensive restoration work while the Education Centre offered a catalogue of public programs including writing courses, fly-fishing lessons and seminars on a wide range of topics. This created a balance between maintaining the physical building as a historic site, and honoring the site’s social legacy. A summer kids camp, where kids have the chance to learn about salmon habitat, ecosystems and environmental stewardship, was established.



With the province’s announcement that it would devolve management of all of its heritage sites in 2002, the City of Campbell River gladly took over the site and continues to this day to provide operational funding support for its operations.

Building on the site management practices of the Heritage Branch, and the work of Kevin Brown, today the site involves several partners, including Greenways Land Trust, the City of Campbell River, the Haig-Brown Institute and the Museum at Campbell River.

The Museum at Campbell River has been faced with maintaining the house’s collection, balancing the wishes of the Haig-Brown family

Top left: Roderick Haig-Brown in his study at Above Tide, 1950s. Godfrey Baldwin photographer, MCR 3426.

Top right: Roderick Haig-Brown, 1970s. Photograph taken by long-time family friend Van Egan, MCR18056, Van Egan Fonds.

Below: A UBC field study group toured the Haig-Brown house and property in July of 2013 accompanied by Professor Graeme Wynn and historian Richard Mackie.

with meeting its goals for public engagement. There is the risk of the legacy of the house and property being forgotten, so the Museum's challenge has been to develop programming that will appeal to diverse audiences and that emphasizes the messages of the past that are so relevant today. Although radical at the time, Roderick's environmental views are contemporary, and many of his books are still in print. His philosophies have created a small, yet very dedicated, following. The Haig-Brown House is not a high profile historic site, however one of its strengths seems to be the quality of the experience it offers, deeply impacting those who take the time to understand it.

Sandra Parrish, the Executive Director of the Museum at Campbell River reflects on past and future initiatives. "I think that one of the biggest assets of the Haig-Brown site is the strong community support. There are still many residents who personally knew the Haig-Browns and are intimately connected with the site. Our challenge for the future is to make sure that we continue to develop connections so that the site remains relevant."

The Haig-Brown Kingfisher Creek Society was formed in 1980 with the goals of restoring Kingfisher Creek that runs through the property, providing environmental education and preservation of the Haig-Brown residence. At various points in the creek's history, it had

been logged, moved, and culverted. The Haig-Brown Kingfisher Creek Society evolved eventually into the Haig-Brown Institute with the goal of promoting watershed conservation and the links between ecology and economy through literature and conservation. Campbell River's Greenways Land Trust, who is currently the steward of the greenspace portion of the property, undertook in 2015 another major project to repair damaged portions of the stream.

One of the most successful programs at the house is the Writer-in-Residence program, which began in 2004. Each year, a deserving writer is invited to come live in the house from November to April. The program is supported with funds from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Haig-Brown Institute and the Museum at Campbell River. The writer's time is split between personal writing projects and public programming. Programming is developed specific to each author's interests and strengths, and often includes lectures, school visits, and one-on-one mentoring for emerging authors. Most of the writers that have been at the house have been focused on nature or environmental topics. For some writers, the res-

idency was their first introduction to Roderick Haig-Brown, however, all of the writers have left the residency feeling forever connected to the man, his family and their home.

A fall festival is held annually on World Rivers Day at the site. One highlight of the festival is the presentation of the City of Campbell River's Stewardship Awards.

"How fitting that we celebrate the spirit of this conservation ethic through the annual recognition of stewards who walk in these same footsteps to care for our common resources such as clean air, water, fish and wildlife, and the habitat on which we all depend", explains Terri Martin, the Environmental Specialist for the City of Campbell River.

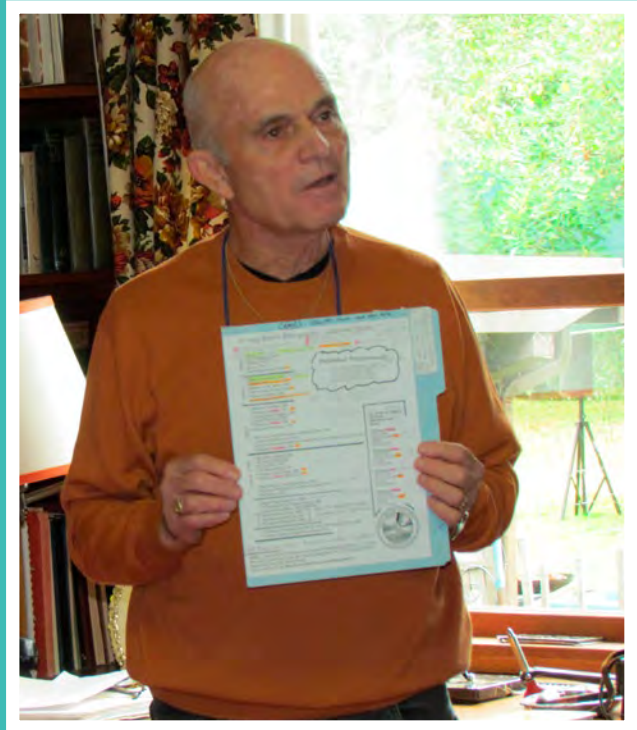


Each fall, the Museum at Campbell River, the Campbell River Arts Council and the Haig-Brown Institute host the Annual Haig-Brown Memorial Lecture. Many of the lectures have focused on the enduring environmental ethic of Roderick and Ann, addressing contemporary issues in environmental conservation. The 2015 lecture by Bev Sellars entitled “Aboriginals, Conservation, Fish and our Common Survival” was delivered to a packed house and sparked dialogue amongst the attendees that continued well beyond the event. Sellars also spoke at local schools in a partnership with School District 72. Other lectures have included Van Egan’s “For the Love of the River”, Harold Rhenisch’s “Land for the People”, and a joint lecture by all four Haig-Brown children entitled “What We Learned”.

Valerie Haig-Brown, one of Roderick and Ann’s daughters expressed her satisfaction with the management of the property, “The family are very pleased at the way the house and garden are cared for and with the way the place continues to evoke the spirit of our parents for us and for our children and grandchildren”.

Recently, Jenifer Iredale, retired Senior Curator with the Heritage Branch, applauded these successes. “The Museum at Campbell River has and is doing good work to not only preserve and present the house and collection but to continue and expand the impact of the Haig-Browns’ conservation ethic and community spirit. This was one of my dreams when we first established the historic house museum.”

Erika Anderson is the Promotions and Membership Coordinator at the Museum at Campbell River. Her background in literature and in fisheries management has contributed to her keen interest in the lives and legacy of Roderick and Anne Haig-Brown. She has been a Director with the Haig-Brown Institute since 2008.



Top: David Brown of the Haig-Brown Institute reading in the study during the Haig-Brown Festival.
Photo credit: Sandra Parrish

Above: Booths on conservation topics, such as this table from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, provide information to visitors to the Haig-Brown Festival.
Photo credit: Sandra Parrish