



Street Stories

Wren Street

GPS: [49.136,-122.3383994](https://www.google.com/maps/place/49.136,-122.3383994)

Before there was a railway in Mission, there was “Big John” Wren. A decorated war hero and an early pioneer, who became a leader in the community he helped found.



John Reynolds Wren presided over the first fall fair in 1894 and lent an important hand in the tugs of war between Mission and Matsqui. “Mission always won,” wrote his grandson, Bernie, “when Big John was anchor man.”

Mission Community Archives 0300-179-005

Born in St. Andrews, New Brunswick in 1843, Wren fought for Canada at the time of the Fenian Raid (1866), for which he received a medal. Before coming west, he married Nancy McKibbon, with whom he would have five children.

Just shy of 40, Wren brought his family to the wilderness that was Mission in the fall of 1882. He took up a homestead on the bank of the Fraser River close to where Wren Street is today. He had to carve a clearing out of the dense bush himself. Then, when he decided to build a house, he had to have the lumber hauled up the river—there was no railway yet. In addition, because there was no road or even trail to his homestead, he and his helpers had to pack the lumber up to the site from the river--on their backs! The house, completed in 1885, was a landmark in Mission until it burned to the ground in 1925.

Always interested in public affairs, Wren was one of the four founding councillors when Mission incorporated in 1892 and continued on Council for an additional eight years, serving as reeve from 1902 to 1908. Some of his accomplishments as a local politician included: the establishment of new business taxes to raise funds for road improvements and drainage plans around major local enterprises, and a permanent finance committee to more effectively handle payment of accounts and collection of taxes and fees. He also led the creation of a Board of Works to better manage and coordinate road construction and maintenance within the municipality.

This giant of a man died in 1910 at the age of 67. His obituary ran on the front page of the local paper. It said, in part: “The district loses a pioneer who has left his impression upon the events of his day in such a manner as not to be forgotten for several generations. His actions will be more appreciated in the years to be than during the time that he was among us.” His legacy lives on through the street that bears his name.

by David Buss and Val Billesberger

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