

# Village of Cumberland



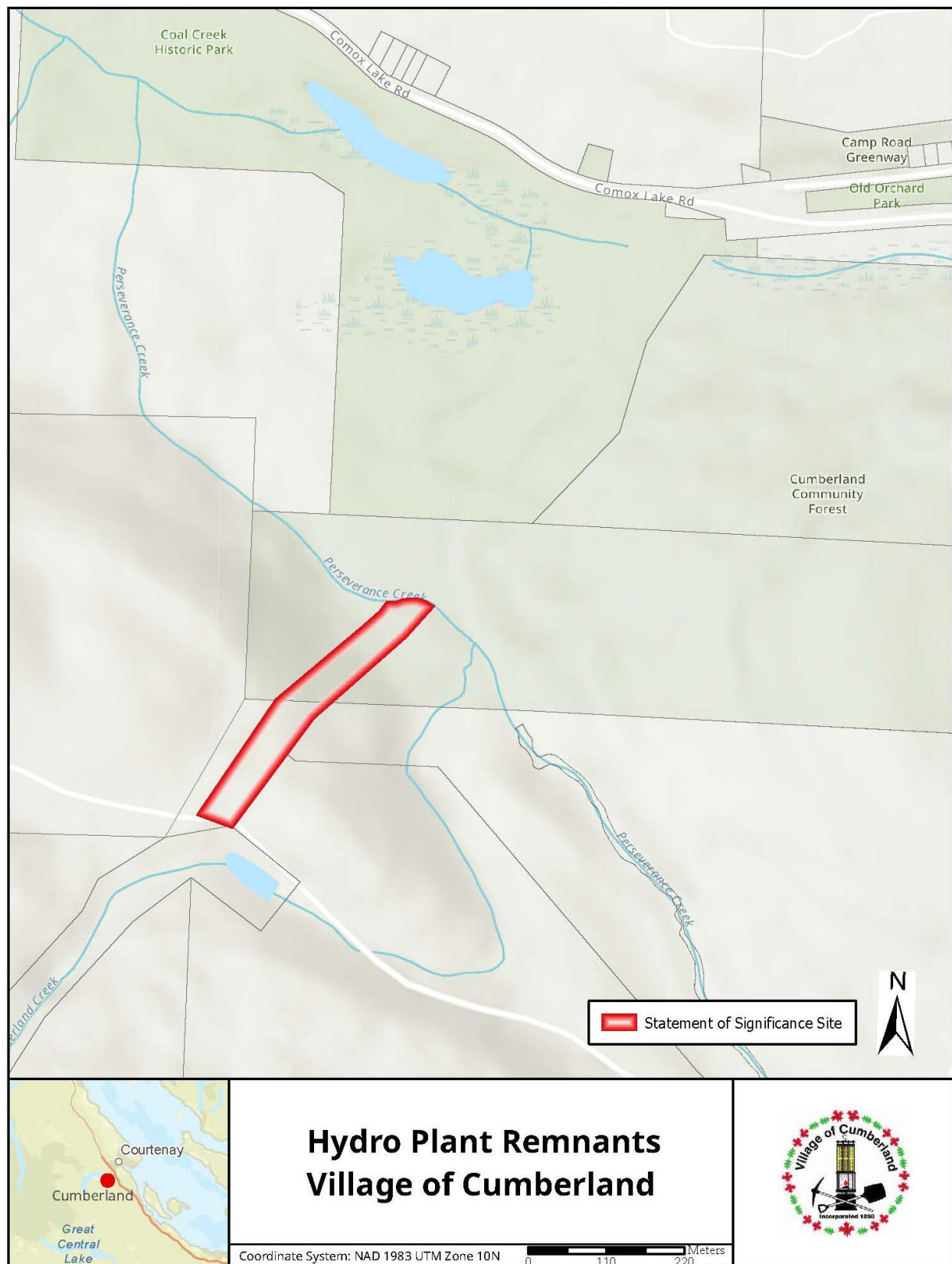
## Statement of Significance

Cumberland Electric Light Co. Hydro Plant Remnants

49.61140° N, 125.05434° W (Coal Creek Historic Park), Cumberland BC ::  
1906



Prepared by Elana Zysblat, CAHP :: Ance Building Services :: July 2025





## **Description**

The Hydro Plant Remnants of the Cumberland Electric Light Co. Ltd. are a rectangular concrete plinth structure measuring approximately 30 feet by 5 feet, located in a forested section of Coal Creek Historic Park along the Dodge City Downhill (DCDH) Trail about 1.5 kms southwest from the core of the Village of Cumberland, BC (49.61140° N, 125.05434° W). Three rectangular metal mounting plates are embedded in it, as well as additional early hydroelectric plant component remnants.

## **Heritage Values**

This historic place is valued for its association with the 45-year legacy of the Cumberland Electric Light Co. Ltd., formed in 1902 to serve the Canadian Colliery interests in the Comox Valley, and expropriated by the BC Power Commission in 1947. This site specifically represents the company's first effort in 1906 to centralize Cumberland-area hydro electric production in one plant after initial operations that had each mine producing their own electricity. This plant supplied not only the No. 6 Mine but also the homes and businesses in Cumberland itself.

This site is valued for its association with American-born, George Wilt Clinton, an employee of the Colliery who established the Electric Co., who is also remembered for supervising the building of the Wellington Colliery Railway in 1888-1889, as the developer of the 1914 Ilo Ilo Theatre in Cumberland, the founder of the Courtenay Light Co. that same year, and for acting as the American Consul in the Comox Valley until 1919. It is also valued for its association with American-born, electrical engineer, Joseph Daniel Winningham, who became the superintendent and electrician of the company's first steam plant in March 1904, and managed its replacement in November 1906 with a larger plant at this location behind Chinatown, for which he oversaw the new infrastructure and technology. Winningham had come to Cumberland from Victoria, where he had worked for the Hinton Electric Company, a dealer in electrical machinery, wiring, and supplies.

These plant remnants hold scientific value for representing the technological shift from steam-generated power to hydroelectricity. As this plant was water wheel (turbine)-powered, it generated a significantly higher quality of electricity than the company's earlier 1902 steam plant that powered only the No. 6 Mine. Electricity here was generated by two separate water wheels mounted on concrete, (and ultimately also by a smaller third one), supplying electricity to the then "City of Cumberland" as well as to the mine camp, Chinatown, Japantown and No. 6 Mine until 1913 when the new Puntledge River power plant, also developed by the Canadian Collieries, began operating.

The plant's strategic location at the northwest foothills of the Beaufort Range (at the time known as Mount George) and about 1000 feet below a series of dams and lakes (with one dam about a mile back from the plant), hints at the dramatic topographic transition between the low Comox Valley (where Cumberland sits) and the mountain ranges to the east that offered the perfect setting for early hydroelectric and waterworks infrastructure to serve Cumberland in its first decades of existence.

## **Character-Defining Elements**

- Original location behind Chinatown at the foothills of the Beaufort Range situated in a direct line below a series of lakes and former dams
- Industrial concrete plinth structure measuring approximately 30 feet by 5 feet made up of a rough aggregate mix with river rocks visible at the bottom

- Three rectangular embedded and bolted metal mounting plates - two large and one smaller one, evidently added later
- Three arched water outflow openings in the concrete structure below each mounting plates adapted to the turbine sizes
- A water pipe head between the two large mounting plates
- An additional large metal plate (possibly for anchoring the generator)
- A vertical metal electrical grounding rod a few feet to the west of the structure
- Association with early waterworks infrastructure that aligned with the 1906 electric grid including a sunken shut-off valve (metal wheel) located a few 100 yards to the east towards Chinatown
- Surrounding access trails and cleared areas that appear to be associated with Cumberland's early hydroelectric and waterworks infrastructure



## Appendix A- Current Photographs



Above: View of the concrete structure (the elevation facing Chinatown) with two of the arched water outflow openings as well as the outflow metal pipe. Below: View of the top of the structure with embedded and bolted metal mounting plates, as well as the metal plate for anchoring the transformer.





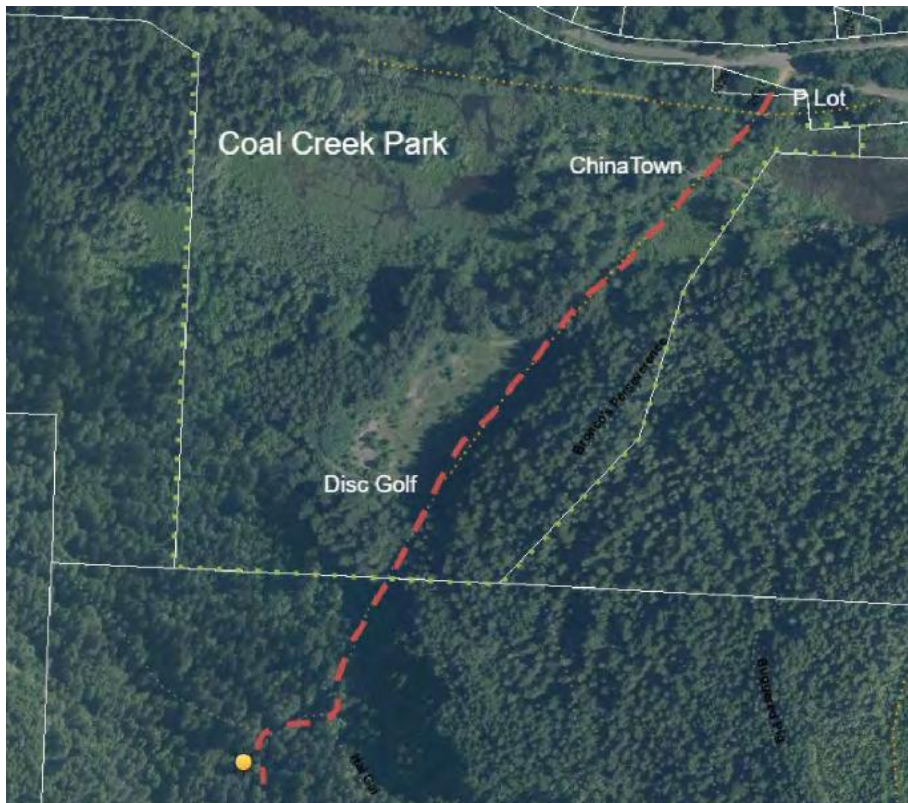
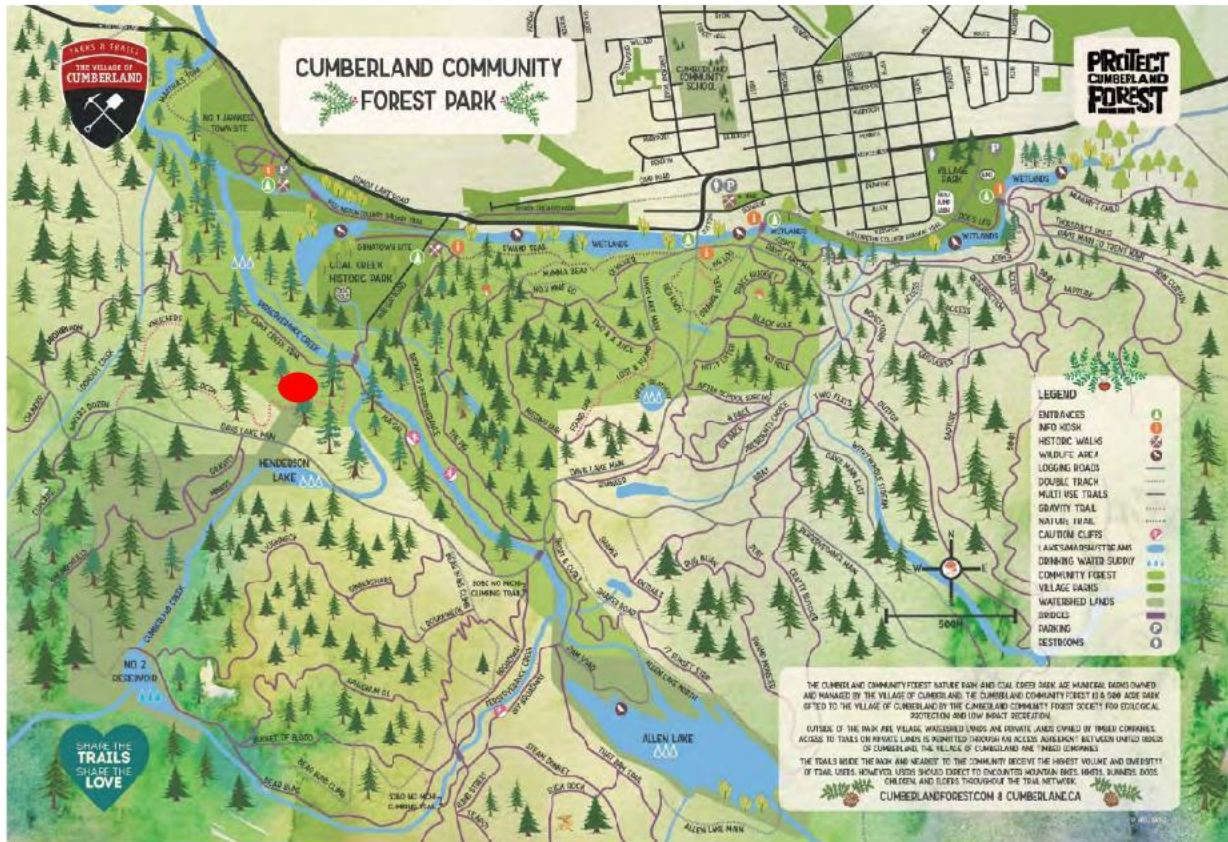


Above: View of the concrete structure from the rear (mountain side). The right portion of the structure appears to have been added. It is lower and has a smaller turbine pier and a smaller arched outlaw opening. Also visible (marked with an arrow) is the grounding rod.

Left: View of the sunken shut-off valve (metal wheel circled) located a few 100 yards to the east towards Chinatown. This infrastructure appears to be framed in wood timbers, capped in aluminum.



## Location



Above: Approximate location marked in red on the Cumberland Community Forest Park map.

Left: Precise location (yellow dot) and access trail from parking lot (dashed red line) marked on a Google map.

## **Appendix B- Historic Notes**

The founder of the Cumberland Electric Light Company, George Wilt Clinton (1861-1929), was the Colliery Company's time clerk, paymaster, storekeeper and acting postmaster in the 1890s, working out of the company's office log building which later became the Tan Lee laundry in Chinatown.

The Cumberland Electric Light Company's first 1902 plant was housed in a building alongside No. 6 Mine and was run by steam from a pipe connected with the mine engines. In November 1906 the Cumberland Electric Light Co. moved to a new location behind Chinatown at the foot of what was then known as Mount George. This 1906 plant was housed in a 20' x 40' powerhouse building with an excellent water supply served by a series of dams and lakes running water to the plant through a 10 inch pipe. There was a dam about a mile back from the plant at a height of 1000 feet above it. This new plant supplied not only the No. 6 Mine but also the homes and businesses in Cumberland itself.

Joseph Daniel Winningham (American-born in 1875, married in Victoria, BC 1899) became the superintendent and electrician of the company's first steam plant in March 1904, taking over from Mr. Hy Campbell, and managed its replacement in November 1906 with a larger plant at this location behind Chinatown, for which he oversaw the new infrastructure and technology. Winningham had come to Cumberland from Victoria, where he had worked for the Hinton Electric Company, a dealer in electrical machinery, wiring, and supplies. He left the Cumberland Electric Light Co. in July 1913 to return to Victoria, in time with the opening of the new Puntledge powerhouse. He died in Comox at age 49 in May, 1923.

Even the 1906 plant wasn't sufficient for the growing needs of the mining and towns of the valley. A bigger power plant was designed, with the site selected for the development of a regional electric powerhouse on the Puntledge River just below Comox Lake. It involved storage of water in the lake. The construction of the power plant started in 1911. The powerhouse and foundations were completed in the year 1912 while the construction of the dam and the penstocks and installation of the machinery was completed in the year 1913. The power was switched on for the first time in August 1913, likely nulling the need for the 1906 plant behind Chinatown, as this new powerhouse not only supplied all the power requirements for the various mining operations but also supplied light and power in bulk to the neighbouring towns under contract to the Cumberland Electric Light Company, the Courtenay Light Company and the Royston Electric Light Company. This operation continued for many years. In 1947, the plant was expropriated from Canadian Collieries Limited by the BC. Power Commission, BC Hydro's predecessor. The company then rebuilt the diversion dam, penstocks and powerhouse to expand the electrical output to nearby communities. The dam was upgraded once again in 1982.



Devoted Especially, to the interests of Comox District

CUMBERLAND B. C., TUESDAY, DEC. 3, 1907.

**The City's Light.**The News man "On the Wing"  
Sees "The Juice" Turned On.

About a fortnight ago the Cumberland Electric Light Co. which supplies the city and camp with light moved into their new home at some distance behind Chinatown at the foot of Mount George. Owing to a rash of job-work which kept the whole office staff busy our man on the wing failed to keep his appointment to visit the new place and our readers were denied a pleasure which we trust they will regret.

When the Company first opened up for business some five years ago the plant was housed in a building alongside No. 6 mine and the plant was run by steam from a pipe connected with the mine engines. Last year the Company added to their plant a water wheel which it was found assisted materially in giving a much better light and so satisfactory was the one wheel that the management decided to run the whole plant by water.

Accordingly this year a new building about 20 x 40 was erected and connected with an excellent supply of water. Extensive improvements have been made this year to the water system by the Cumberland and Union Water-Works Co. A series of dams and lakes now supply the water to the city and camp and also the electric plant, the water to run the plant coming through a ten inch pipe from a dam about a mile back and from a height of about 1000 feet. Some places the pipes are almost perpendicular. The pressure we were informed is over 400 pounds to the square inch and about double that of the pipes supplying the city and camp.

The equipment of the plant is composed of two superano water wheel mills, which make about 1500 revolutions per minute but can be raised to double that speed; two 90 kilowatt 2200 volts alternators; two 2 kilowatt exciters, all being set in solid cement about six feet deep; and other necessary appliances, including two magnificent marble switchboards.

One generator supplies the city with light, while the other does duty for the camp, Chinatown, Jap town and No. 6 mine. The capacity of each is somewhere in the neighborhood of 2,000 lights, and is capable of supplying many more lights than present requirement.

It would be impossible to pass by without reference to "the man behind the light" Mr. J. D. Wittingham, who turns on the "juice" having the management of the plant generally. He has been with the Company about four years and has proved himself a careful and practical all round man, although he would probably blush if one called him an expert, yet claiming about fifteen years experience some of which was spent in Seattle, and in the employ of the Hinton Electric Co. of Victoria before taking up his present position. His services are well understood locally and he is

**The Fire.**

On Wednesday morning last the citizens were aroused by the ringing of the fire bell at about 2 a.m. There was a scramble and a rush to the scene of the fire—the stable used by the Comox Co-operative Association and Mr. P. Monte.

The fire itself had an excellent start. There was a delay in having the water turned on account of not being able to find the nozzles. Once the water was streaming on the flames from the two nozzles the fire was under control in a few minutes, but much of the hay had to be thrown out before the firemen deemed it wise to retire.

The alarm was first sounded by some young folks who were enjoying themselves at the home of Mr. Charles McDonald.

The losers are Mr. P. Monte, owner of a very valuable horse; the Comox Co-operative Association of a horse; Mr. W. Harrison owner of the premises.

Suspicion that the fire was not merely accidental but the work of the fire flood led to an investigation being held on Thursday evening before the police commissioners. Mr. P. Phillips Harrison conducted the inquiry. After considering all the evidence brought in the commissioners came to the conclusion that

"Upon considering all the evidence adduced in the premises, we the undersigned police commissioners of the City of Cumberland have mutually come to the conclusion that the said nozzles concealed as aforesaid, were wilfully so concealed and that the aforesaid was wilfully ignited or started by some person or persons to us unknown."

has charge of the plant during the still hours of the night.

The move from the old to new home was done in two days. The plant supplying camp was moved one day and when it came time to turn on the lights the plant was running along as steadily as though it had done duty before. When the city plant was moved and had it not been for the slight mishap of a "hot box" everything would have been well. As it was everything was all O. K. in the course of a couple of hours.

The Company we understand is controlled by local capital who deserve credit for the enterprise shown in providing such an excellent system of lighting, and it is safe to say that the citizens of no city of the same size has better light.

Mr. R. O. Endo accompanied by his sister returned from Flatland, North Dakota where they were on a visit to their parents. "Ed" is enthusiastic over his trip but glad to get back to business and to Cumberland.

Mr. H. Heritage and family left for Vancouver on Thursday.

Mrs. O. P. Stevens has as a guest her mother who arrived on Wednesday.

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Left: Newspaper article titled "The City's Light" from December 3, 1907 announcing the new hydroelectric plant behind Chinatown. The most relevant paragraphs are outlines in red and enlarged above. Source: Cumberland News newspaper - UBC Special Collections

Mr Winningham is now in charge of the Electric Light Works, Mr Hy Campbell going back to his former position with the Colliery Coy.

March 8, 1904 notice naming J. D. Winningham as the new the manager of the Electric Light Works taking over from Hy Campbell.

Source: Cumberland News newspaper - UBC Special Collections

NOTICE.

On account of necessary repairs the electric lights will be shut off from 12 30 a.m. Sunday, June 5th, to 7 p.m. Monday, June 6th.

Cumberland Electric Lighting Co.  
J. D. WINNINGHAM, Manager

May 31, 1904 notice naming J. D. Winningham the manager of the Cumberland Electric Light Co.

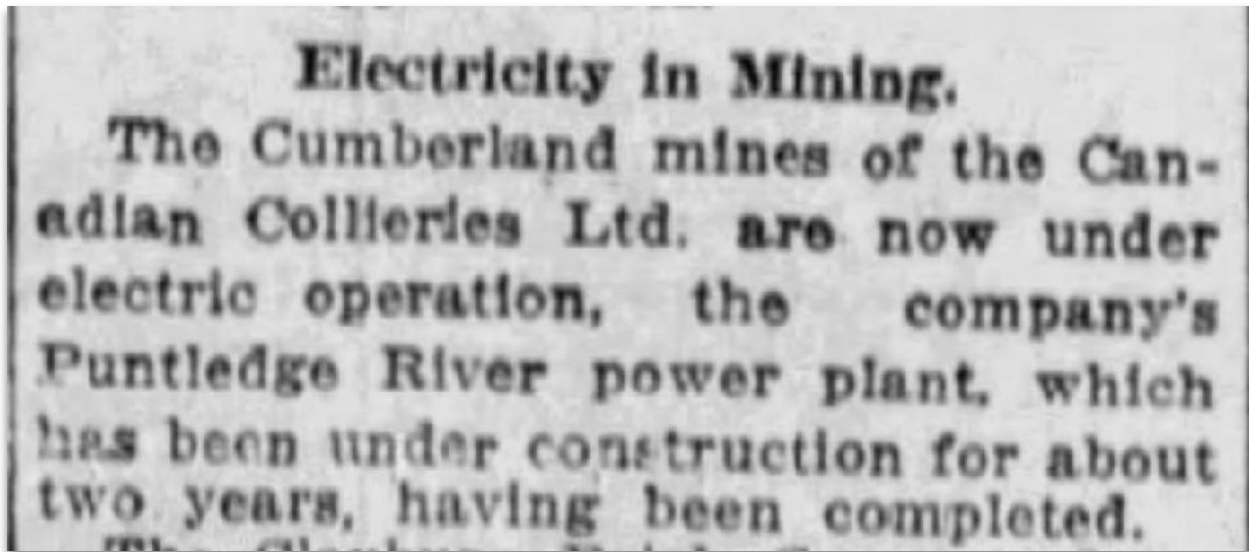
Source: Cumberland News newspaper - UBC Special Collections

Mr. J. D. Winningham, who for a number of years has been electrician for Cumberland Electric Light Co., Ltd., has resigned his position, and will leave this week for Victoria, where his family has been for some time. We wish "Harry" every success wherever in future he may locate.

June 30, 1913 notice announcing J. D. Winningham leaving the Cumberland Electric Light Co.

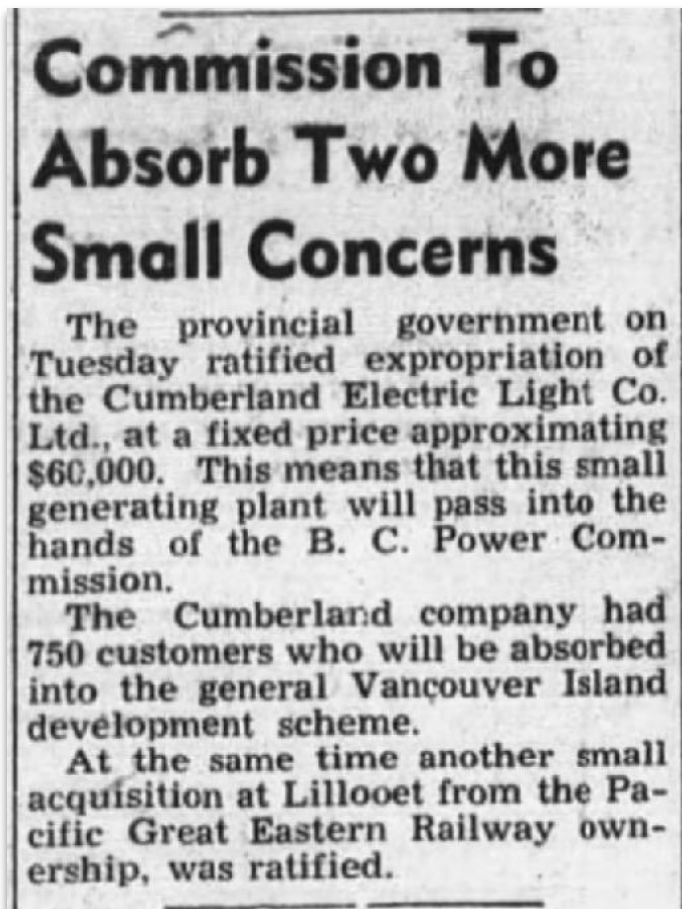
Source: Cumberland News newspaper - UBC Special Collections





Above: October 25, 1913 announcement about the opening/operations of the Puntledge River power plant which replaced the subject site.

Source: The Province newspaper - [newspapers.com](http://newspapers.com)



Left: June 4, 1947 article announcing the taking over of the power plant by the BC Power Commission to become BC Hydro after a merger in 1962.

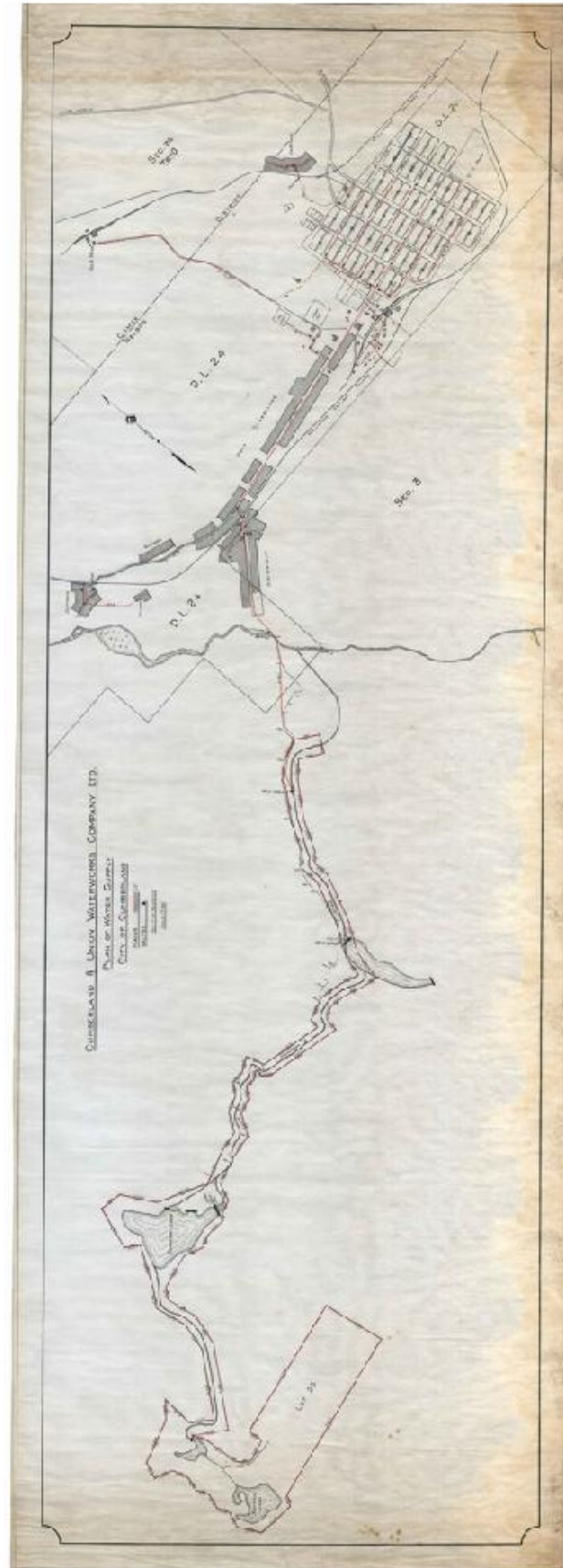
Source: Nanaimo Daily News newspaper - [newspapers.com](http://newspapers.com)



A Cumberland Electric Lighting Co. Neon sign held at the Cumberland Museum & Archives. Photo courtesy of Dawn Copeman.



A Cumberland & Union Waterworks plan from 1920, showing how water at the time was supplied to Chinatown, the two Japanese neighbourhoods, the black community's neighbourhood, the City of Cumberland and to No. 5 and 6 Mines. Source: Village of Cumberland files.



## **Research Resources**

Cumberland Archives  
Biography of George Wilt Clinton  
Cumberland News newspaper hard copies 1901-1907  
Cumberland Electric Light Co. Ltd. receipt  
Cumberland Electric Light Co. Ltd. neon sign

Village of Cumberland  
Cumberland & Union Waterworks Company Ltd. - 1920 water supply map

Courtney Archives  
Aug 3, 1990. The Record newspaper - Article by Patrick Hind about the history of electric power in the Comox Valley.

UBC Special Collections  
Cumberland Islander and Cumberland News archival articles about Clinton, Winningham and the Cumberland Electric Light Co. from the late 1880s until 1929

Isenor, Dick E.; Stephens, Edith G.; Watson, Donna E. 1988. One Hundred Spirited Years: A History of Cumberland. Ptarmigan Press. Pages

[newspapers.com](http://newspapers.com)

Site visit March, 2025