

In October 2005 a special ceremony was held at the North Cowichan municipal hall to honour one of its long-time residents, Freeman Don Morton, on the occasion of his 99th birthday, by naming the road to the hall Morton Way. There was mention of his many contributions to the Municipality while a politician. For many who grew up in the Cowichan region they will remember his years as a North Cowichan Councilor, 1954-1959, Reeve, 1960-1969, and with the change of title, Mayor from 1968-1969 and then again as alderman from 1970 to 1973.

Born in Staffordshire, England, on October 13th, 1906, he immigrated to Canada in 1922 at age 16, farming in Manitoba with his brother Tom before heading west to Vancouver Island in 1936. Don found work as herdsman at a very unique farm, thus part of the story. He then began promoting the agricultural initiatives within the Cowichan Valley through his hundreds of articles in the Cowichan Leader. A decade later Don, his wife Gwen, and young son John, struck out on their own, starting a new Ayrshire dairy farm.

DON MORTON

Fairbridge Farm School Herdsman & Agriculture Reporter

The records of the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School, Cowichan Station, V. I. mentioned that Don was hired on January 1st, 1937 as herdsman. It is not known exactly how large the cattle herd was at that time although, when the farm school was bought from F.B. Pemberton in the spring of 1935 it mentions the Fairbridge Society would be acquiring a working farm that "in addition to the land, they were buying the implements, machinery and stock on the farm, the last named including 200 ewes and as many lambs, 10 registered Clydesdale horses, a small herd of seven Ayrshire cattle and about 15 Yorkshire swine,"¹

The farm manager was John Brown and had been employed at the Pemberton Estate since 1919, while his brother-in-law, J. Reid was the general farm hand, first hired in 1920.²

Nevertheless, it looks like plans were afoot to significantly increase the herd as a new, much larger cow barn was built in the summer of 1937.³ Quite likely there had been some early discussion with Captain J.C. Dun-Waters, owner

of one of the finest Okanagan farms, located on the west side of lake some 42 kilometres from Vernon. Dun-Waters, an Ayrshire enthusiast had been attempting to sell his 1000-hectare Fintry Estate for some time. Being unsuccessful, in the spring of 1938 he gave almost all the property, the machinery and the livestock to the Fairbridge Farm Schools Inc. to be used as a training farm for the older students from the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School. By the middle of July the first three Fairbridge students, John Hunter, John Monnington and Henry Brayfield had taken up residence at Fintry.⁴

As a side note it should be mentioned that nine years before Dun-Waters, a Scot, presented the University of British Columbia with a gift of twenty-four head of registered Ayrshire cattle from the best herds in Scotland. In time this became the nucleus of what was to become one of the finest Ayrshire herds in Canada.⁵

Farm records show that by the following year, 1939, there were 50 Ayrshire cattle in the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School herd and a year later the number had jumped to 75 for Don to manage. It was Captain Dun-Waters who was responsible for giving the foundation stock for the Fairbridge herd⁶

By now Fairbridge was a real working farm school as the following information from their records illustrate.

Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School

<u>Livestock</u>	<u>Crops</u>
Cattle 50 head	Kale 1 acre
Horses 12 head	Arable Pasture 15 acres
Pigs 110 head	Vegetables & Truck Garden 7 acres
Poultry 600 head	Potatoes 7 acres
Sheep 50 head	Grains 125 acres
	Hay 75 acres ⁷

Fintry Fairbridge Training Farm

Land

Orchard 100 acres (22,000 boxes of apples
Annually from 5,000 trees)
Hay 175 acres
Range land 2,100 acres
Residential & Farm Home Site 150 acres

By 1939 Don Morton began submitting articles to the Cowichan Leader about the farming throughout the Cowichan Valley and elsewhere on southern Vancouver Island. He was especially keen on promoting the many excellent Ayrshire dairy farms, their annual field days on the Lower Mainland and Island and the cow-judging events. For example, in June of that year Dick Speed of Fairbridge was third out of twenty entries in the junior class at the Shannon Bros. farm in Cloverdale. He had been accompanied to the meet by J. Brown and Don Morton.⁸

Also, Fairbridge began hosting more and more farm events. On Good Friday in 1940 a plowing match was held, there were also annual flow and gardening shows and of course news of the farm

school Ayrshire herd continued to be mentioned by Don in the Fairbridge News section of the Cowichan Leader. The following report of March 6, 1941 reads as follows:

“Three more Canadian Ayrshire cows—two in B.C. and one in Quebec—have reached a total production of over 100,000 pounds of milk. One of these, Fintry Honeysuckle, bred by the late Capt. J.C. Dunwaters, is in the herd at Fintry Fairbridge Training Farm. She has produced 109,875 lb. milk, 5,243 lb. butterfat, average test 4.76 per cent in eight lactations or 2,729 milking days.

Several sisters and one daughter of this great cow are in the Ayrshire herd at the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School.

Another cow, from the same herd, Fintry Royal Lily, is listed as the highest producing two-year-old in Canada in 1940, with a record of 13,925 lb. of milk and 581 lb. butterfat. The dam of this outstanding young cow and her dam are also in the Prince of Wales Fairbridge herd.”⁹

Don also wrote a number of other stories about larger farms and their owners as well as the promotion and results of the local fall fairs, the annual field days held by the B.C. Ayrshire Breeders Association and all new farming initiatives underway. The farm school hosted the first ever Ayrshire field day held on Vancouver Island. Over 100 Ayrshire breeders from the Lower Mainland, the rest of the Island and Washington State came, not to mention others in charge of the UBC Ayrshire herd and farm exhibitions.¹⁰ By 1941 there were six Ayrshire herds with another four changing over within the Cowichan area.

Almost every entry of the Fairbridge News mentioned prominent men and women visiting the farm school, including many very involved with agriculture such as the Federal Minister of Agriculture, The Hon. Hugh Gardner, Mr. E.R. Bewell, Dominion certificate seed potato inspector and Mr. Will Mackie, who along with Mr. Ed Wells of Sardis, it was reported, were the first to bring Ayrshires into British Columbia and professors or staff from the University of British Columbia. There were also reports of the trainees

going to or returning from Fintry and the involvement of farm trainees and staff exhibiting or judging Ayrshire cattle at the various fall fairs or larger "Canadian Pacific Exhibition" in Vancouver or Provincial Exhibition at Victoria.¹¹

Like so many of the staff before him, Don's employment and involvement in other activities at the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School would be interrupted because of the Second World War. On September 5th, 1941 he left to join the 5th B.C. Coastal Brigade. Besides being herdsman and chiefly responsible for building the first-class Ayrshire stock he was also the secretary-treasurer of the social and athletic club, house master of Blue House for a short time and the assistant cricket coach as well as umpiring games.¹²

The loss was felt beyond just the farm school since there was next to no major agricultural stories in the Cowichan Leader over the next few years, save for what came in by way of the community correspondents.

At the first of October Andrew Macfarlane, along with his family, arrived from the Fintry Fairbridge Training Farm taking over Don's responsibilities. They took up residence in the small house previously occupied by the Don and his wife Gwen. (This is the present 'school house-herdsman's house located beside the Fairbridge Chapel).¹³ Mr. Macfarlane had been employed for a number of years as herdsman at Fintry so was well versed with Ayrshires, including many of the Fairbridge herd that had originally come from this Okanagan Valley estate. He remained at Fairbridge for three years resigning on May 25th, 1944 taking up a position to manage Captain C.L. Anderson's Haughland Ayrshire farm, also located in Cowichan Station, for two years and then other farms on the Island and Lower Mainland. He was succeeded by Mr. D. Fisher.

With the war in Europe winding down it is quite likely Don Morton was discharged, returning to the Cowichan Valley in June of 1945 and wrote this major article that appeared on the top left corner of the front page of the Cowichan Leader

titled: "First Ayrshire Show In West Held At Fairbridge". It reads in part: "Fairbridge Farm

School had the honour on Saturday (June 31st) of being the site of the first Red and White Ayrshire show held in Western Canada. Visitors from the Mainland and points on Vancouver Island expressed themselves as very highly pleased with the wonderful display of Ayrshire cattle, 62 in number. In the words of the two judges, Mr. Oliver Wells, Chilliwack, and Mr. John Paton, Glen Valley, every individual was a credit to the exhibitor.

One of the highlights was the expertness of the boys and girls of Fairbridge in handling and showing the Farm School herd of pure-bred Ayrshires.

Honours Well Divided

The honours of the day were evenly divided. The female grand championship was won by Fairbridge Farm School, with Fairbridge Ellen. The junior championship and reserve grand championship was won by H. Dawson & Son, Nanoose Bay...

Much could be written of the grand display in the group classes, where an entry of seven was the average. The graded herd and progeny of dam classes were won by Fairbridge; the senior and junior get of sire by Haughland Farm.

Youthful Experts

The junior competitions in both showmanship and judging were very closely contested; and here again the boys and girls, especially the girls, of Fairbridge gained high honours...

Luncheon was supplied by Cowichan Ayrshire breeders with Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Don Morton in charge.

Visitors inspected the Fairbridge Farm School herd of over 60 head, built up from the well-known Fintry stock. The school buildings and grounds were also thrown open for inspection."¹⁴

By August more and more stories about the District's agricultural initiatives and problems were appearing, often on the front page. For example, there were three stories, one titled "Unexpected Frost Damages Garden, Farm Produce", and two others dealing with Fairbridge. The first mentioned that 40 acres of land was being logged and cleared for cultivation. "This will bring to about 280 acres the tillage land on the 1,028-acre property."

The other article, directly under the one about the land clearing, and again on page one, told a very different story that took place on August 16th.

“Fairbridge Loses Three Barns, 150 Tons Hay in Fire

Fire destroyed three barns and 150 tons of hay in an outbreak at Fairbridge Farm School on Friday afternoon which caused an estimated \$20,000 worth of damage. A few minutes after the fire was discovered between two of the buildings, it was raging too strongly for the Farm School’s fire brigade to quell.

Forest service personnel and volunteers from neighbouring farms and Duncan helped fight numerous spot fires fanned by stiff wind, saving nearby dwellings from possible destruction. Forty dairy cows that were in one of the barns for milking when the blaze started shortly after 5 p.m. were all brought to safety. Efforts of volunteers were greatly appreciated by the school, as were offers of hay and assistance with milking...”¹⁵

By now the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School had been operating for ten years and news about their exceptional Ayrshire pure-bred herd and other farming activities continued to be written up in the local press by Don. In October the Fairbridge News mentioned that the Canadian Ayrshire Review, September issue, included a long article describing the Ayrshire show held at Fairbridge Farm School. “To breeders on V.I. goes the honour of holding the first ‘red and white’ show west of Ontario,” it stated. And further; “Perhaps the highlight of the show was the wonderful display of showmanship by the boys and girls of Fairbridge. They showed the animals well, and to Jock Bennett, who made such a wonderful job of showing Fairbridge Ellen to the female championship, congratulations, and to Jack Brown much can be said for his training of these boys and girls who came out to Canada from the Old Land during pre-war years.”¹⁶

The following week the Fairbridge News column in the Cowichan Leader briefly mentioned that

with Don Morton now back from overseas he would soon be resuming his position as herdsman at the farm school.¹⁷

During most of the early 1940’s the Cowichan Leader devoted much of its attention of the war and printed only about 12 pages. By 1946 there was a second section, many more farm related articles and even special monthly sections dealing exclusively with the activities in the Cowichan Lake and Chemainus areas of the Valley.

The 1946 Annual Report of the Fairbridge Society mentioned that there were only 60 boys and 21 girls at the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School along with 19 men and 18 women on staff by 1945. This likely included the party of 17 boys and 10 girls that arrived on July 29th, 1945. They were the first children to be sent overseas since November 1941. In 1946 two other small parties totaling 15 boys arrived to the farm school. The following year a large party of 28 was sent to Canada in May and in on May 25th, 1948 the final party of just three boys and three girls came to Fairbridge.¹⁸

From 1946 through to 1950 Don Morton continued to write lengthy stories in the Cowichan Leader about special events at the farm school, the excellent Ayrshire dairy farms in the district, and the establishment of new agriculture clubs or organizations.

For example, in May 1946 Fairbridge hosted meeting of Island agrologists associated with the agricultural Institute of Canada. Then in June there was a field day at the farm school for the B.C. Swine Breeders’ Association and in June a poultry demonstration and lecture by Dr. S. Woods of U.B.C. for the senior agriculture class and farm staff. The annual farmers’ field day also took place at the farm school that year as over 70 persons came to inspect the Ayrshire herd, the market gardens and greenhouses.¹⁹

Later, in early September, there was a front-page story about the annual Red and White Show put on by the Island Ayrshire Breeders.

The article stated; "The kings and queens of V.I. Ayrshire herds were displayed in the Agricultural Hall grounds on Thursday for the second annual Red and White Show.

Haughland Ayrshire Farm, Cowichan Station (Mr. C.L. Anderson) and Fairbridge Farm School (Mr. J. Brown, manager; Mr. D. Morton herdsman) captured most of the awards..."²⁰

It wasn't just the dairy cattle winning awards for the farm school. In the fall Fairbridge participated in the Victoria Horticultural Society exhibit and their 15 entries won 11 firsts and four second prizes in the vegetable classes."²¹

Beside his position at Fairbridge Don was also very involved, along with Andrew Macfarlane, in getting the Cobble Hill Calf Club organized reporting on their first outdoor gathering at Haughland Ayrshire Farm. Shortly after a Swine Club was also started and students from the farm school were members of both organizations."²²

In the spring of 1947 Don left Fairbridge and established his own Ayrshire cattle farm at Stratfords Crossing in North Cowichan with Neil Thompson becoming the new herdsman."²³

Things seemed to be looking up for the farm school in the mid 1940's. Children were once again coming from the British Isles, some 56 more acres were cleared for pasture, the pure-bred Ayrshire herd was one of the best in Canada, and plans were being made to even construct new buildings. The former farm school principal, Harry Logan, now general secretary for the Fairbridge Society told the Duncan Rotary Club in the first week of January 1948 that "all the farm schools of the organization will be filled up as soon as staff and transportation are available."²⁴

Less than three weeks later stories about the possible closing of the Fairbridge farm schools appeared in the daily papers. This resulted in a statement issued from W.J. Garnett, Principal of the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School mentioning in part: "The restrictions on the movement of sterling from England have put the organization in a vulnerable position but

the administration has good reason to believe that sufficient funds will be forthcoming on this continent to enable the school to maintain its present establishment until such time as the transfer of sterling again becomes possible."²⁵

Editorials and articles appeared in the Cowichan Leader throughout the spring reporting on the virtues of the farm school, the possible promise of federal assistance and the Duncan Rotary Club acting as godparents to two Fairbridge children through a funding grant to the school.

By August a story appeared in the Vancouver Sunday Sun and reprinted in the Cowichan Leader suggesting that 100 young Britons will be arriving for a new life "on Vancouver Island at one of the most unusual schools in Canada." Very little more was said about the problems facing Fairbridge except that the 100 children never arrived."²⁶

Meanwhile, Don was continuing to write about the advancements made with the Ayrshire farms in the Cowichan area. In November the Fairbridge herd, along with a number of others, completed the first Ayrshire type classification on Vancouver Island (only the UBC herd and another one in Sardis had been so classified in the province up to that point in time). It mentions that James Ross was now herdsman and that of the 32 Fairbridge stock inspected, two were rated as excellent, meaning they scored over 90, and eleven considered very good with scores of 85 or more. It was by far the best overall herd in the district."²⁷

Early in 1949 a number of staff, including Principal Garnett and W.G. Chappell resigned their positions at the farm school and as reported in the 'Ayrshire Notes', "A carload of Ayrshire cattle left Duncan last Thursday en route to Creston..." Eleven head were bought from Fairbridge Farm Schools and two from Dawsondale Farms, Nanoose Bay." On July 1st the farm bunkhouse, which had been one of the original buildings bought from F.B. Pemberton in 1935, burned to the ground in the afternoon of July 1st, Dominion Day, when most of the staff and students were in Duncan for the celebrations."²⁸

Finally, at the end of August an announcement was made by Mr. Logan Mayhew, chairman of the Canadian board, that: "no more children would be brought to Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School, Cowichan Station, from Britain. Then the entire Canadian board, through resolution, retired effective August 31st. Sir Charles Hambro, chairman of the Fairbridge Society, London indicated they would now concentrate on its three schools in Australia, "where money exchange problems do not exist and prices reported to be lower." The lead editorial in the Cowichan Leader was simply titled "Broken Dream".²⁹

While the farm school sent a few Ayrshires to the P.N.E. that fall and took home first prize in the R.O.P. cow class with Fairbridge Flirt it turned out to be the final exhibition they would participate in. Don Morton wrote a very lengthy story in the Cowichan Leader—Record Livestock Show—and under the Ayrshire section mentioned the absence of both the Fairbridge and Haughland herds although there is mention of Rod MacKay taking first place for a junior not member of a club displaying a calf.³⁰

By the end of October, it was announced that the Canadian Pacific Railway, which had taken a keen interest in the farm school right from the beginning would be assisting the Fairbridge Society to maintain the property and buildings, leasing out the farm while bringing British families to the area under their Canadian Colonization Association where they would reside in the home site cottages.³¹ A week later company staff arrived at the farm school inspecting the land and buildings. Don Morton also mentioned in the Ayrshire Notes that John Brown, farm manager at Fairbridge had left and was now working for Riverside Farms and that other staff were planning to follow him.³²

With the inventory complete, another story, likely written by Don, stated that the CPR Colonization Department and Fairbridge officials would be auctioning all of the livestock and machinery of Fairbridge Farm School, Cowichan Station, in early December. The article went on to say: "The forthcoming dispersal of the famous herd of Ayrshires is causing a considerable stir among purebred dairy cattle breeders.

About 70 animals are to be listed, including a number of cows which have won honours in the show ring as well as being noted producers.

Inquiries from Ayrshiremen in U.S.A., as well as from several widely-separated points on the Mainland have been received.

Most of the herd is directly descended from animals imported from Scotland by the late Capt. J.C. Dunwaters, Fintry, and the present herd sire, St. Blain Sir Henry 2nd, was brought to Fintry from Quebec because of his outstanding pedigree."³³

The following week a large advertisement appeared in newspapers announcing the December 6th "Complete Dispersal Sale" and listing the stock and farm equipment. The livestock included:

- 65 head of registered Ayrshires
- 10 head of bred heifers
- 9 Clydesdale horses
- 450 Barred Rock-Haven Hampshire cross-bred laying hens
- large selection of sows and young Yorkshire pigs
- 12 hives of bees³⁴

The sale attracted farmers from the Island, the Mainland and Washington State. The Cowichan Leader lengthy article written by Don started:

"A large crowd attended the Fairbridge auction sale on Tuesday when the farm school's famous Ayrshire herd was dispersed.

The average price of the 65 head was reported to be about \$230...Fourteen head sold for \$300 or more each. Top price in the females was \$550 paid for the three-year-old cow, Fairbridge Amelia, by Mr. John Ross, Duncan.

The herd sire, St. Blain Sir Henry 2nd, went to McBride & Stevenson, Sardis, for \$525"

Don ended the article in this manner, "Many old-timers spoke of the dispersal of the group of nine Clydesdale horses as being pathetic.

An exceptionally fine lot of heavy draught horses sold for an average of less than \$40 apiece."³⁵

1950 began with a deep freeze and an article with Don's name in the byline. The headline read "Zero Hour On The Farm" and mentioned

the problems farmers were having not only on the Island but also in the Lower Mainland due to frozen water pipes, power blackouts and the roads being blocked with snow.³⁶

With regard to the farm itself, by late February the CPR and the Fairbridge Society had decided to lease the property (except the greenhouses) to Messrs. McBryde and Stevenson of Sardis. On Friday, March 24th the new tenants arrived, “unloading seven cars of livestock, machinery and household effects with a great many of local farmers lending a hand including Don, Jack Bulcock and a number of Fairbridge boys. Ayrshires and Clydesdale horses were again on the school’s farm and as Don wrote; “One Fairbridge boy remarked with evident satisfaction. “the old barns are alive again”.³⁷

The next month the first three Scottish families arrived and took up residence in the cottages at Fairbridge. More families would follow.

Don Morton would continue to promote the Cowichan Valley agriculture community for many more years as reporter and then farm editor for the Cowichan Leader. Of course, whenever he wrote an article on cattle shows and judging, the Ayrshire results always got top billing. Don also operating his Ayrshire dairy farm at Stratfords Crossing, near the base of Mt. Prevost north of Duncan, until 1966. On the final day of March, 2008 Don passed away at age 101.

References

1. “A Goodly Heritage”, Corp. of the District of North Cowichan, 1973
2. Cowichan Leader, 1935-1950
- 3 British Columbia Archives- Fairbridge Farm School Files (various boxes)
4. Fairbridge Gazette (various issues)
5. Fairbridge Glimpses, 1985
6. University of British Columbia, Faculty of Land and Food Systems (www.landfood.ubc.ca)

Footnotes

1. Cowichan Leader, February 21, 1935, p.1
- 2 Ibid
3. Ibid. June 24, 1937, p.1
4. Ibid. July 21, 1938 and The Fairbridge Gazette, Autumn 1946, mentions that Fintry Lily was the first foundation cow coming from Fintry to Fairbridge in May 1935. By 1946 she had 105 direct descendents including 18 of 30 milk cows in the herd of 70 at the farm school.
5. University of British Columbia—Faculty of Land and Food Science, Dept. of Animal Science Part 1,—Historical Profiles of the Department
6. British Columbia Archives, Fairbridge Farm School Files; Restricted Files Box 1 File 8
7. Ibid
8. Cowichan Leader, June 15, 1939, p .6
9. Ibid. March 6, 1941, p. 6
10. Ibid. June 26, 1941, p.1
11. Ibid. July 10, p. 3 and August 28, 1941, p. 1
12. Ibid. September 11, 1941, p.1
13. Ibid. October 9, 1941, p.6
14. Ibid, July 5, 1945, p. 1
15. Ibid, August 23, 1945, p.1
- 16 Ibid, October 4, 1945 p.5
17. Ibid, October 11, 1945. p. 7
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19. Cowichan Leader, May 23, 1946, p.1
20. Ibid, September 5, 1946, p. 1
21. Ibid. September 26, 1946, p. 3
22. Ibid, March 20, 1947, p. 14
23. Ibid, June 12, 1947. p. 1
24. Ibid, January 8, 1948, p.1
25. Ibid. January 29, 1948 p.1
26. Ibid. August 26, 1948, p. 14
27. Ibid. November 25, 1948. p. 6
28. Ibid. July 7, 1949, p. 1
29. Ibid. August 25, 1949, p. 4
30. Ibid. October 27, 1949, p. 1
32. Ibid. November 3, 1949, p 19
33. Ibid November 10, 1949, p. 1
34. Ibid. November 24, 1949, p. 4
35. Ibid. December 8, 1949, p. 23
36. Ibid, January 19, 1950, p.6
37. Ibid, March 30, 1950 p.13

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