Mr. William Barraclough:
Thank you Mr. President for giving me this opportunity of performing this pleasant duty of presenting our speaker this evening, Mrs. McGirr, whose subject is the history of Wallace Street. And you'll notice I said presenting, not introducing, for our speaker in no way requires introducing to the members of the Historical Society.

On your notice, I drew a sketch of a building on Wallace Street that at one time was the business home and the residence of the Lawrence family of which our speaker, Mrs. McGirr, was a member of the family. And you wouldn't … And she's not on the picture actually, but looking at the little sketch the other day, she said, "You know that just looks like my brother that's standing, leaning against the post there." You'll remember him, I suppose everybody here will remember him as Louis Lawrence? Right.

Now that makes Mrs. McGirr part of the history of Wallace Street herself. And so, I know she has put a lot of research into this question and her own personal experience of Wallace Street. I'm sure we're looking forwards with great anticipation in hearing about other buildings on Wallace Street tonight. You had a sample of what the outside people think of it, you that came late, you didn't hear that letter read. It's a wonderful letter of some old timers that lived on Wallace Street. And we're going to hear, I'm hoping we're going to hear, who Wallace Street was named after. I don't know. And I'm sure we'd like to hear more about the old timers on Wallace Street and the events that took place there. There is so much history attached to Wallace Street that really hasn't been presented to any of our meetings before. And so ladies and gentlemen, it is with the greatest pleasure that I can think of, to present to you this evening our speaker, Mrs. F. McGirr, whose subject is Wallace Street. And very noticeable here, all in her ancient costume. Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

[Applause]

Pardon me, one item here, I forgot, and I should have mentioned this, I think it's a very opportune time to recognize the service that Mrs. McGirr has rendered to the Historical Society of Nanaimo. And I'm going to, I'd made this out some time ago and it's a, where the offices have served, and Mrs. McGirr was a secretary for five terms, from 1956 to 1960. And then she's president for two years, 1961 to 62. And then she became treasurer for eight years, from 1963 to 70. A total of 15 years dedicated service to Nanaimo Historical Society.

[Applause]
Mrs. McGirr:
It's not going yet is it, Mr...

I'm going to tell you about Wallace Street, as seen from a child, myself. And many of us know, the best way to recall our home town is to stroll about in it. And in seeing a special edition of our *Daily Free Press* in 1859, I couldn't help noting the many changes in our town since my childhood. So I decided to go back and walk along the length of the five block street I had lived in so many years. Which just 20 years before had been almost a trail. When our then first mayoral Bate had strolled along it.

Nanaimo had outgrown the waterfront and it became necessary to move back, and as the ravine cut through the town from Comox Road to Victoria Crescent, the next step was Wallace Street. Named after Charles W. Wallace, the Victoria agent for the Vancouver Coal Company. So this evening, I shall try to show you this interesting street as I remember it, and how it has changed over the years.

I shall begin my stroll at the most northerly point of Wallace and Comox Road. Where on the eastern side stands our first cemetery. Looking, even then, overgrown and neglected, with great maple trees hanging over it. But always of interest to us as children. This Nanaimo First Cemetery, with its last burial but one in 1876, had become full of brambles and broken headstones until in 1953, the Nanaimo branch of the Historical Society urged that something be done to restore it. In 1958, the Hub City Kiwanis Club cleared the plot, and turned it into a memorial park. All headstones that could be saved were placed in a stone wall, grass and flowers were planted, and our Mr. Barraclough restored the lettering on many gravestones. A plaque had been placed at one end, telling of its history, and the names of those buried were found, were placed there.

7:18

A small house, next to cemetery, had been moved from Fraser Street, but that was some years after we moved there. Leaving the pioneer cemetery, were just trees, until we come to another small cottage, which when the street was graded, was way below the sidewalk. And was a short time later rebuilt with a large part of the house above the street, which one entered across a small, sort of a bridge.

Adjoining this house on the corner, was a large house lived in by a painter, who we always called Hosie. The steep hill alongside was known as Hosie’s Hill, and which made a wonderful hill for sleighing in the winter. This hill ran into the ravine, and later, at the foot, was placed Good’s Warehouse. It was really the lower half of Campbell Street, named after George Campbell, an early director of the Vancouver Coal Company. The small house before mentioned was inhabited by Thomas Hodgson and family, a many times school trustee. Our high school, when turned into the Agricultural, from the Agricultural Hall, into the high school on
Machleary Street was named after him. He was mayor in 1909. That whole family has gone now.

As we cross Campbell Street, we find this block also has changed beyond recognition. As it then was a block of private homes. The first one, a tall, narrow, pinkish house lived the Pargeter family, and with who I went to school. In this same block, and next door, lived the Wenborn family. Very old timers, and whose business was a machinist. He was burnt out in the fire of '94, and four years later, his home burned down, and the family left Nanaimo.

Three small houses next, in one lived a Mr. McBain, a lawyer. And beside it, in a small house, was the Sampson home. The Sampson home, at that time, like all the others on that side of Wallace Street, sloped towards the ravine, or as we always called it when we were children, the gulley. I quite remember the well in their backyard. When the Sampsons just stooped to get their water, and to clean a fish if they had one, right off the side of the well. In the front, left hand side, on the corner, stood a large shed, which was used as a photographer's building before Mr. Sampson opened his general store on Commercial Street, which is now the Nash Hardware store.

While the children were too many for this small house, he bought the big white house on the north corner of Prideaux Street. The house of Mr. Gordon, our M.P, who had died, and the family had moved away. It is now a rooming house.

Mr. Ron Norris is not here tonight I don't think? [inaudible] but when he was a child, he lived in the Sampson house, because I remember babysitting for him.

A large, red, square house, built by a Mr. Whitfield, a shoe merchant on the long bridge, was next door. Lived in then by a Mr. John Bell of the Electric Light Company, who had also left. And it was taken over by his brother, Mr. Ward Bell of the Electric Light Company. And he had left, but had married a sister, of our first president in the Historical Society, Mr. Jack McGregor, whose father at that time was a local mine manager. Later, our old friends, the Freemans, whom you all know probably, bought the house and lived there until it was torn down. And is now a doctor's office.

Not one house on this block is there now. The [Pupito?] house, built some years later, is on the corner, although it was not there when we were children. This particular block has doctor, plumber, chemists, sign writer, but not a sign of anything left since we lived there.

13:43

We now come to the eastern side of Wentworth Street, very steep and never used as a roadway or for sleighing, as the bushes and trees had never been removed. And it was too steep to sleigh ride on. But at its side, Mr. Pimbury, our late chemist, had a lovely garden. And just on its corner, Mr. Summerhayes, a bricklayer, had built a home. And along his lot, and opposite in
front of the convent, was quite picturesque, there were very tall poplar trees, shaded this part of
the block. Now Mr. Summerhayes always reminded me of the time one of their boarders gave
our children books to read, I still have some of those books at home. But also he kept bulldogs,
and one of them bit my sister and had to be shot.

This lot also ran down to Fraser Street. Mrs. Barraclough's grandfather had lived in a small
house on this same corner years before. And you all know, he came over on the Princess
Royal.

On the same lot, but next door, was a Chinese laundry. Consisting of four cabins under one
roof. And they belonged to a Mr. Richard Nightingale. Many a time we watched the Chinese
ironing. They had a little stove about that size, standing up on a table, with an, sort of an iron
rail around it, and all these irons, about six of them, stood up against this little stove to heat
them. And these Chinese always wore white, never saw them in any other colour.

We came next. My father's Eureka Soda Works. A large, barn like looking building, with a
commodious upstairs for the family. And the only part left, on that whole of Wallace Street is the
remains of that building. Any of you pass there, will see it. It is now a refrigerator plant.

I will remember the long, triangular corner of this lot, which is now being made into a small rest
camp by the Lions Club, before climbing Fitzwilliam Street. Named after Mr. Charles Wentworth
Fitzwilliam, the director of the Vancouver Coal Company. This old building has been a soda
works, a restaurant, a farmers' market, and is ending up as a refrigerator plant. And on that
corner for a time was built a large billboard. Each side of the street, to advertise the Walter L.
Main Circus, the first one to come to Nanaimo. Now that is a story of its own, so I won't tell you
about it. Later, the new Ladysmith Lumber Company had an office on this corner. And the
Electric Light Company had their office there. Later on the library, where the Historical Society
met for some time, until it was turned, torn down, a few years ago.

Here we lived. When one beautiful Sunday morning, about seven o'clock, fire struck and we
had to get out. A blacksmith shop, the machine shop, a furniture store, the Bastion Street
Bridge, all burned down.

[speaking quietly] There's the picture there.

However, everything was alright and we went back home.

The last block on this side of Wallace Street, next to the bridge of course, was very steep. Very
rough. Only a small store, which was burned down in the fire and where a Miss George, one of
our early school teachers lived. I don't know if any of you would remember her or not.

19:34
And, we watched that large brick building, belonged to Mr. Nightingale, be built, for, for some time I should say. And the Vipond's Livery Stable came next. And many of you may have seen the lovely garden if you looked over the bridge some years ago at the back of that building. The McNeil building was burnt down last year. The Vipond Building some time before. Which has left nothing on that block that was there from when we were children.

I will remember, when the Viponds lived there, training wild horses on Wallace Street. That brings us to the end of that side of the street. Many years later, other buildings have gone up, but not while I was there.

Now then, shall we walk back, on the other side of the street, the corner of Albert, Victoria Crescent, and Wallace. Where stood the fine home of Mayor Bate, in the early '90s. This home had been built by Mr. Robert Dunsmuir some, built somewhat back from Wallace Street, and with its carriage house, and outhouses, reaching back to Dunsmuir.

Fenced along Wallace Street, and up Albert Street, it was an imposing structure, and remained there until about 1911 or 12, when it was moved to Selby Street. At the beginning, the house that stood in its place was a log house. Albert Street was named after Queen Victoria's consort, Albert. Wallace named after Charles Wallace, I mentioned before, the Victoria agent for the coal company. And the name of the house was Ardoon.

This block, from Albert Street to Franklyn, was a high bluff, rock. From this corner, for the next block, for the next five blocks I should say, was the one chosen by Mr. Bate for expansion when he walked along this street in 1874.

Adjoined this, but much further on the bluff, was the Franklyn house. But in front, and touching Wallace Street at that time, was a blacksmith's shop. And a livery stable, with a small house close by. The Akenhead family lived in this house, they were a very old family as well. The rest of the land to Franklyn was vacant.

As this large, brick house, which was built in 1861 by Captain William Hales Franklyn, it commanded a fine view. To me, it was always there. And was torn down when our new city hall took over. It was lived in at that time by the Rumming family. And the last tenants were the Reifel family. This block hasn't a vestige remaining, as I remember it as a child.

As we cross Franklyn, on the corner, where now stands a wholesale building, in 1892 or 3, the Methodist Church, quite an imposing building, and dedicated by Mr. Samuel Robins, and at that time a fine looking building, with the parsonage built some distance back. Two years later, it's still there now.

Mr. Barraclough was married in this church I believe.
Mr. Barraclough:  
49 years ago.

[background chatter and laughter]

Mrs. McGirr:  
Yeah.

On the very side of this, close beside this, next, lived at that time a Dr. Wright ...

[tape skips]

... where now, the Criteron Cleaners are.

At that time, for food, we used to send an empty crate, on the old steamer, Joan, to Comox. Came back full of butter, the best butter in the country supposed to have come from there. We always had cheese, fish, meats, and a Chinaman used to come around with vegetables, selling them from a wagon. Milk was poured into your pail, what you needed. Lots of blackberries, as I remember.

So now, we will just take a very quick look at Wallace Street in 1972. We will only see the Haslam house, the Nightingale house, the Yates house, or the Wolfe house, as we always called it. And on the west side, part of our old shop, and now a refrigerator plant. Business everywhere, such as restaurants, city hall, wholesale offices, and buildings and doctors' offices, but no churches. The street was needed for business, as most people had moved away.

As I see it, Nanaimo outgrew the waterfront with a few exceptions. Our great forest trees were felled, and people moved back. Coal was replaced by timber, and our population grew and grew and grew. Until now, we are living in a different world. Thank you.

[Applause]

27:13

Mr. Barraclough:  
Mrs. McGirr, the Franklyn house, that you referred to at the corner of Franklyn Street?

Mrs. McGirr:
Well, it's right inside the corner, yeah.

Mr. Barraclough:  
This gavel of ours here
Mrs. McGirr:  
Oh yes.

Mr. Barraclough:  
Was made from a piece of the California redwood that I snitched from the house when they were pulling it down.

Mrs. McGirr:  
Well, I should have it. Yeah.

I have a picture here, it's not in very good shape, but I think I'll try to have another one taken off, of the Bastion Street Bridge just after the fire. And this little snapshot, gives you a corner of the, right down here, where the Bate house was.

Mrs. R.J. Walley:  
Mrs. McGirr, on behalf of all of us here, I do want to thank you, most sincerely, for such an interesting talk. I can't believe your memory and all the research you have done. To think that you have told us so much about these five blocks on Wallace Street. And I do hope that the stately home of Mr. Haslam will remain and the home of Captain Yates, where the [aubrieta?] falls down in the stream so beautifully, I'd love to know what they ...[inaudible]

Mrs. McGirr  
Thank you very much.

[applause]

I haven't said very much about the homes that were not there when we lived in. There were a few, and the letter you had, oh, the letter you read, I knew the family. Yeah.

[unidentified male]  
There we go.

Miss Elizabeth B. Norcross  
This letter came in from one of our members who was not able to be here tonight:

It is with regret that Len and I will be unable to attend the meeting of the Historical Society on May 18th. I have another meeting in Vancouver. We wonder if we may be able to read the paper or hear the tape at some other date, as we are particularly interested in Wallace Street. Len's grandfather, John Pargeter, lived at about 100 Wallace Street in the 1880s. His mother was born and married from that home. My father boarded with Mrs. Garnett prior to 1900 at about 35 Wallace Street. And my widowed grandmother and her family of four daughters and one son lived at the corner of Fitzwilliam and Wallace. So you see, this street
has real meaning in our own personal lives, and we really are disappointed that we must miss this meeting.

And that is signed, Mrs. J. L. Nicols.

Mr. Barraclough:
Mrs. McGirr, was presented to the gathering by William Barraclough. Mrs. R.J. Walley expressed the appreciation of the members to Mrs. McGirr for her excellent paper, which was the result of much research. Mentioned in particular the Haslam and the Yates homes. The Secretary, Miss Elizabeth B. Norcross, read the letter from Mrs. J. L. Nicols.

Mrs. McGirr:
Just as a postscript to my story of Wallace Street, the Lions Club had just opened a new resting spot at Fraser, Fitzwilliam, and Wallace Street. This small, triangular corner will be a welcome and picturesque spot. After years of idleness. Many years ago it was a favourite place for advertising, as billboards were built along both sides. Later, a lumber office was constructed here. It also housed our Electric Light office, and until our library was built, higher up Fitzwilliam Street, it was used as such for some time. Also the Nanaimo Historical Society met here until it was demolished several years ago. This corner has now become a beauty spot with its benches and planted shrubs around a Japanese plum tree.

Wallace Street is one of our oldest historic streets. And our first mayor strolled along it, looking for room to expand.

This is one of a series to keep Nanaimo history alive. Presented by members of Nanaimo Historical Society.

[tape ends]