

Robert Service

Robert Service, who invented Dan McGrew and Sam McGee, was a resident of Duncan in the late 19th century. Although born in Lancashire, England, Service was of Scottish descent and lived his teenage years in Scotland and immigrated to Canada when he was about 21 years of age.

In 1899, Robert Service was living in the Cowichan Valley where he was a farm labourer and a clerk in one of the local stores. Several of his poems were published in the *Victoria Daily Colonist*.

About that time, Service met a young lady named Constance MacLean at a dance in Duncan. He fell madly in love with her. However, Constance wanted a man of substance and education. In an attempt to win her over, Service studied at Victoria College (then a college of McGill University). Unfortunately, he failed (at college and at love).

By 1903, Service was broke and took a job with the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce in Victoria. He was soon transferred to Kamloops and then to Whitehorse, where he became known as the **Bard of the Yukon**. Robert Service died in 1958.

I am convinced that, had Service remained in Duncan, he would have become a lawn bowler (after all, the immigrants to the Cowichan Valley at that time had nearly all arrived from the British Isles). If that had happened, perhaps the words to his famous poems might have had a different flavour.

With apologies to Mr. Service, I have edited his most famous poems, *The Cremation of Sam McGee* and *Dangerous Dan McGrew* to reflect what he might have written had he remained in Duncan.