

VALLEY HISTORY

AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A 1K0 342-9769 MAY, 1996

Atmosphere Aplenty In a Mountain Hotel

from FURROWS AND FOOTHILLS
by Ken Liddell
The Calgary Herald
circa 1950's

INVERMERE, B.C. - It was cold outside. The kind of dampish cold that comes on those dreary evenings when the clouds ring themselves like a hoop skirt around the mountain far down from the top.

Constable Wilf Emde of the Mounted Police said the weather had been like that for quite a few days and he was getting fed up with it. Then he brought in his legs and crossed one over the other and said "there's lots of warmth over here."

And to keep the warmth going, Charles Fabbro, the handyman, lugged in another armful of wood for the fireplace in the Invermere hotel sitting room.

The people sitting there were the usual types you find in country hotel sitting rooms of an evening after supper. At least in this part of the country. Travelers, forestry men, visitors just putting up for the night. There was little conversation, no noise but the crackling of the cozy fire and the rattling of a newspaper as somebody turned the pages and, occasionally, the ooooh hoooooo of a half-suppressed yawn.

It was quiet and it was warm and as a fellow drowsily gazed out the window at the rain dripping from vines on the trellice along the front walk it wasn't at all difficult to imagine yourself to have been suddenly moved back 50 years.

The whole atmosphere of the place was like that. So it was rather surprising to have Mrs. A. E. King appear in response to a little pressure on the button under the sign on the desk, "ring here for service."

And Mrs. King, who certainly did not come with the fixtures, was not in the least annoyed when I said, "this place has the atmosphere of 50 years ago."

Mrs. King, who has been running the hotel for two years, smiled and replied. "well, I'm trying to

tidy it up but I want to retain that atmosphere. By the way, are you in the new wing?"

And with a perfectly straight face, she went on to explain that what is known as the "new wing" is that part of the hotel which was built in 1912.

That was around the time that William Weir landed in Invermere and in due course became a part owner of the hotel, the original wing of which, if you are at all curious, was built in 1897 by Tom Gordon, who later became well known around Banff. Mr. Weir relinquished his interest in the hotel some years back and it has had a procession of owners until Mrs. King acquired it and a lot of ancient articles that were in the basement.

One of these articles she took to her home in Vancouver and made into a lamp. She said everybody admires it, but nobody seems to know just what it is.

I've never been in a hotel that had such big radiators. Big everything, for that matter. In the bathroom was the biggest cake of soap I've seen since the folks stopped making it back on the homestead.

The room was so big I could have ridden a bicycle around it. Maybe this was because no space was taken up by a clothes closet. I couldn't find a hook to hang my clothes so at night left them on a chair. A big chair, of course. In the morning I found the clothes closet in the bathroom. I could have ridden the bicycle into the bathroom, too. As a matter of fact, I could have slept in the clothes closet.

I was telling Mr. Weir about this and he smiled, shook his head and said it was like a room he encountered in a hotel in Glasgow during a recent visit home.

He said he stepped off the bathroom and it was 21 feet long. He said the bath was seven feet, six inches long. He said one of the other affairs in the bathroom was operated by a chain and on the other end of the chain there was a porcelain handle that was easily two feet long. He said it made a terrible noise.

Well, the Invermere Hotel in that regard is as modern as any Canadian hotel. And with its big radiators it outstrips some of the best in the Old Country, judging from what was said by Mr. Weir, who must have had a good trip. He said one thing he could not understand was why the British would develop jet planes so others could get around the

world so fast while they were content to stay at home and freeze.

The Invermere Hotel has two porches. One is open and the other is screened. It has a long and wide lawn with big shade trees and a stone fence. From the lawn is a beautiful view, when it isn't raining, of the mountains and Lake Windermere. The hotel is two storeys, painted white.

And the folk who sat on the porches or walked the lawn so many years ago heard the whistles of the boats on the lake, boats like the Nowitka, Isabelle and Klahowya that ran from Windermere to Golden.

Those were the days, said Miss Gladys Pitts. Miss Pitts is Invermere postmistress. It took a day to go down stream and two days to go up and near Radium an "s" in the Columbia River was negotiated with the help of a capstan. Now and then the boats would stop to take on wood. Everybody had a good time. Sometimes a boat would push a scow out on the lake, an orchestra would strike up and they'd have a dance out there.

Even the names of the places have changed. The communities are so close together you are hardly aware of leaving one and entering another. Windermere has always been Windermere, but Invermere used to be Canterbury; Wilmer was Peterborough and Athalmer was Salmon Bed. Salmon spawned there.. The boats tied up there, too. A peculiar thing today is that the C.P.R. station is known as Lake Windermere, but the post office, Athalmer, is just across the tracks.

In the days Miss Pitts recalled, the mail came by stage. It still does for that matter, but more frequently. Miss Pitts' uncle, R.A. Kimpton, ran the four-horse stage team that took four days to get from Golden to Cranbrook.

The mail arrived at night and on mail night the Invermere hotel was a friendly place. Everybody was there. There were a lot of young men around, working in the two banks or Columbia Valley Irrigation, an outfit that did a lot to develop the area, and there was lots of fun. Everybody helped wash the dishes.

During the last war, when the late W.H. Cleland was running the hotel, it was a social centre. Invermere had no theatre then and Mr. Cleland, a real community booster, held a weekly picture show in the dining room. The proceeds were used to buy comforts for service boys from homes all along the lake from Edgewater to Canal Flat. When they ran out of boys they bought parcels for the Red Cross.

There is a lunch counter in the hotel today, and while Invermere may seem like a long way from home to Calgaryans, signs in the place advertised the

town's blood donor clinic, conducted by Calgary Red Cross workers; an auction sale at Airdrie and the Calgary Stampede.

Most people were rather sketchy in their memories about how the place had operated through the years. Mrs. King thought the C.P.R. may have had something to do with it at one time. Some of the blankets are initialed C.P.R. As nobody has known the C.P.R. to give away one of those blankets, this is a bit of a mystery.

In modernizing the place, Mrs. King said she hopes to maintain the atmosphere. The big stone fireplace, some of it Rundle stone, was just finished by John Nehrings, a newcomer from Germany, with whom stone masonry is a hobby. The stone fireplace replaces a fireplace that was made of plaster, painted red.

For Mrs. King the whole thing has had more surprises than the days she taught school in Glenavon, Sask. If she ever had time she thought she'd try writing a book about running a hotel. Lot of amusing things to record. Like the time she got the radiators from Vancouver. They had not been tested. Instead of a heating system, they acted more like a sprinkler system.

{Note: *The Invermere Contracting Co. in earlier years had owned both the Lake Windermere Lodge and Cabins which had been built by the C.P.R. and the Invermere Hotel. That would explain the blankets.*}

CANADIAN SCENE

by Ken Liddell

Calgary Herald

1956

A few miles south of Radium Hot Springs, B.C., there is what is known as the Historic Indian Village - a sign on an arch over a trail says so - and any time you are passing you are quite free to drive under the arch over the trail and mosey around a place that probably has the only log cabin with built-on garage in the country.

Just what makes it historical is a bit of a puzzle to most white people hereabouts, but if you chat with Fr. Agnellus, who lives at nearby Athalmer, you find that place is of some ecclesiastical importance.

Fr. Agnellus is the Catholic priest who administers to the welfare of his people around

“Windermere is thriving wonderfully there being two ping-pong halls running all the time.

GOLDEN STAR, OCT. 26, 1934

“The Old Bullion mine at Wilmer has shipped a 70-pound cube of gold valued at \$40,000.00.”

DID YOU KNOW?

Sir Winston Churchill visited the Windermere Valley in 1929. Accompanied by his son, Randolph and his brother, Major John Churchill, and his son, John, Sir Winston spent a week at the Radium Hot Springs Lodge which was then operated by Miss Charlotte Armstrong.

Miss Armstrong told the story to Mr. and Mrs. Duncan MacIntosh who purchased the lodge from her.

Recounting the tale Miss Armstrong told them that when the official car drew up Sir Winston lost no time with preliminary pleasantries. Emerging from the car he came at once to the point. “What have you for dinner?” he asked.

The Radium Hot Springs Lodge was built by the CPR in 1922, was razed in 1957 and many of the bungalows were later moved to conform with plans of the federal government. The actual cabin in which Sir Winston stayed while at the spring was purchased by Bruce Downey and moved to his property at Fairmont.

.....

What’s Happening at the Museum

The Opening Tea will be June 8th at 2 p.m. at the Museum. There will be guest speakers. Tea will be served by the Windermere District Historical Society and the Friends of Kootenay National Park. The winners of the Photo Contest sponsored by WDHS and KNP will be announced and the winning photos will be on display. Kootenay National Park staff will be at the opening with displays concerning the

Ecohistory that is currently being researched at the Park.

There will be another Tea and display on July 8th at 2 p.m. at the Museum. This will be to honor the many years of service to the Red Cross by local residents.

May is clean-up month at the Museum. There are many volunteers involved in cleaning the buildings and freshening up the displays. Many thanks to all who participate.

The Museum will be open in June following the opening tea. Once again we are thankful for the volunteers who do this year after year. We will be looking for more volunteers for September. If you can offer a few hours once a week, we’d certainly be pleased to hear from you. It would be nice to give some of the members that work so hard year round a break.

We will be welcoming 4 classes of Grade 2’s in May. Part of their curriculum centres on Pioneer Life. Thanks to our curator, Anne Newhouse, who has worked hard to put together a program and thanks to all the volunteers who will assist her.

For our June meeting we will be taking a field trip to the Windermere Creek B & B. This location has a history going back to the earliest settlers. This will be our last meeting until September. Watch the Readers Notices for future announcements of meetings.