

VALLEY HISTORY
AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM
BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 342-9769 MAY 1997

B.G. Hamilton, beginning in 1902, spent more than twenty years researching Hudson Bay Co. currency used in Canada prior to Confederation when Canadian currency was put into circulation. Following is correspondence with B.G.H. concerning money.

To B.G.Hamilton
From James Stewart, 1902
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

“With regard to the old Hudson Bay Company’s mode of trade with the Indians. At most of the trading posts there was what was called the Fur Store and the Goods Store; in consequence when an Indian came in with his season’s catch of furs he was taken to the Fur Store where he sold his furs receiving in payment certain little sticks each representing one skin, or two shillings sterling. There were also some of these sticks shorter than the ones representing a skin, which were of the value of half a skin or one shilling sterling. With these coins, the Indian went to the Goods Store and bought his supplies such as clothing, ribbons, beads, ammunition etc., spending his so-called money.

I may say here that every transaction between the company’s officers and the Indians was conducted in strict honesty and fairness. there was no attempt made to overreach the poor Indian, and in consequence the Indians placed the utmost confidence in the integrity of the Company. This mode of trading took place at almost every post of the Company except the Red River Valley where Hudson Bay bills were used.

I cannot tell when these bills of “Hudson Bay Blankets” began to be used but I think they must have been introduced shortly after the settlement of the Lord Selkirk Colony in the Red River Valley perhaps somewhere about the year 1820. But I know they were used until the year 1870 when this country was transferred to the Dominion of Canada. They were the only currency in use at the time of Riel’s first rebellion.”

signed: James Stewart.

Stewart arrived in Manitoba in 1851 from the Orkney Islands, Scotland. He was a prisoner on Louis Riel at old Fort Garry in 1869. He was in the service of the H.B. Co.

September 1897
re: Hudson Bay “Blankets”

Mr. T. Clark of Winnipeg, Chief Factor of the H.B.Co. says:

“I came to Ft. Garry first in 1861. They were then in common circulation and they together with gold and silver coins of the realm (Great Britain) formed the medium of exchange amongst the settlers here. A provisional issue was made at about the time of the first Riel Rebellion and shortly after this issue was withdrawn and the bulk of them are in our vault. The reason for getting out of the provisional issue was due to the following facts: upon the ceding of the H.B. Company’s territory to the Dominion of Canada, they had with their control also withdrawn their bills of exchange from circulation.

Through discontent owing to not having received what they considered to be justice in the deal, a number of the French half-breeds headed by one Louis Riel entered into a rebellion against the government from 1869-1870. There being no banks in the country at the time, there was no legal paper money in use throughout the old colony so the new or provisional issue of the H.B. Blankets was brought out. All previous ones obtainable had been redeemed and sent to H.B. House in London.

At the present time, two specimens of the bills - one worth one shilling and one for one pound. are in possession of our Winnipeg people. It is printed in script, Roman and Old English letters in dark blue upon light blue tinted paper and is about seven and a half inches long and four inches wide.

There was also a five shilling note printed in red.

The paper used in each case looks to be that of the fine rice quality so celebrated for its thinness and toughness.”

Signed: H.B. Co. Commissioners Office, Winnipeg.

We have a replica Hudson Bay Blanket on display at the Museum. Our Archival files show that an original was on display in the David Thompson Memorial Fort when it opened in 1923.

Roderick Campbell, HBCo. employee, in his writing of conditions at Lower Ft. Garry in 1859 says:

“My emporium was crowded every day with customers ready to purchase goods or to barter with their furs and agricultural produce. A record of articles sold was entered in a sales book. The currency was English sterling and consisted chiefly of promissory notes issued by my company. Besides the notes there was a good deal of English gold and silver in circulation.”

DUCK DOODLING
By Bob Pritchard

*From the north there came a duck
Flying on the Skookumchuk;
She was treated rather mean
When passing over Spillimacheen,
For there was on a shooting bee
Amongst the boys from Kimberley -
The lonely duck flew one mile high,
To try to get in safety by,
And found the journey was no joke
With her eyes so full of powder smoke.
She turned around, away she flew
over the peaks of the Bugaboo.
Hurry, hurry, please do not tarry
Until you reach a sanctuary.*

*From now on she'll do her quack
Amongst the sloughs of Chilliwack;
And in the spring she won't come back
To give these boys another crack.*

Many of you will remember Bob Pritchard was an early day Police Officer in this Valley. At one time he lived where the Radium Golf Course is now situated.

Here is another lovely little 'bird tale' from Jim Johnston's diary, 1944:

"I have a pair of little bluebirds here that have been nesting for five years in a box I nailed up on the side of our barn. They returned last spring and one morning the little hen bird came to my bedroom window and fluttered up against the pane.

I went outside and stood by the woodpile and the little female brought the male and they both stood about 2 feet away from me. Suddenly they both made a bee line for their box at the barn. I followed up and found that when they left the nest last fall, a squirrel had taken over and filled the box so full of pumpkin rinds that there was no room for the birds to get in.

I cleaned out the nest box and in less than an hour, the bluebirds were busy building.

Newsclips from the Past

Golden Star, August 1928:

"Registered at the CPR Lake Windermere Bungalow Camp are visitors from Edmonton; Swansea, Wales; St. Louis, Missouri; Chicago; Banff; Lake Louise; Syracuse, NY; Elgin, Illinois; Philadelphia; Great Neck, NY; Los Angeles; Madrid, Spain."

Golden Star September, 1928:

"Count and Countess Cisterna of Italy spent the weekend at the CPR Bungalow Camp at Lake Windermere leaving again by special automobile. The Count is first cousin of the present king of Italy."

Golden Star November, 1928:

"The morning of Sunday, October 28, there passed peacefully away Emily Frances Bown, wife of Hardwick Grainger of Canal Flat to whom she was married in August 1904. The late Mrs. Grainger had spent many years of her life in the Windermere District. She was born at Brantford, Ontario in 1880, being one of a large family of the children of Dr. John Y. Bown, MD who as a Member of Parliament for North Brant was one of the members of the first Parliament under Sir John A. MacDonald of whom he was an intimate friend. On her father's side Mrs. Grainger claimed the late Lord John Russell who succeeded as fourth Duke of Bedford to be a close relative, the Duchess being Lady Diana Spencer. Mrs. Grainger is survived by her husband several brothers and one sister. The burial was in the Cemetery at Windermere."

Golden Star 1942:

"James Burnstill has taken up the position of station agent at Lake Windermere Station at Athalmer. Mrs. Burnstill and their daughters have arrived and the family has taken up residence in the CVI building at Invermere."

Golden Star August 24, 1928:

"The friends and relatives of Rosie Kinbasket of the Shuswap Reserve were greatly shocked and grieved when they learned that she had been instantly killed by being thrown from her horse while engaged in racing at the Vancouver Exhibition. Rosie is one of the large family of Kinbaskets who formed practically the whole branch of the Shuswaps living on the local Reserve. Her father was Pierre Kinbasket, one of the last local chiefs of this branch. Her mother Marianne came from the Shuswap Lake country. She is survived by her two sisters Mrs. William Palmer and Mrs. Eugene Joe. She was about 48 years at the time of her death. Rosie was an indefatigable worker, carrying on quite extensive ranching operations, performing all the work with her own hands. She was brought home and quietly buried in the Indian Cemetery.

From B.G. Hamilton files, Nov. 23, 1923:

“I had a conversation with Mr. Malcolm Cameron this morning, who for many years has lived in the district of East Kootenay and who is at present residing on the western bank of the Columbia River just near the mouth of the Spillimacheen.

Mr. Cameron told me that he was born in the Province of Ontario; that he came to Winnipeg in the year 1880; that he spent some time in Golden City in the year 1883. He went on to say he had spent some time freighting on the Columbia River, taking potatoes by row boat from the Windermere District where they were grown to the station at Donald on the main line of the CPR, and taking back freight from there. He said they could convey 2500 pounds in a boat load.

In regard to Sinclair Hot Springs (Radium), Mr. Cameron said that he together with Chas. Copeland and Jim Fowler had in the fall of 1888 built the first log cabin at Sinclair Springs which was ever been put up there; also that that winter he had spent two months in the cabin with his partners. He said he had heard of the Hot Springs in Sinclair Pass in the year 1884.”
Signed: B.G. Hamilton

What’s Happening at the Museum:

Spring cleaning has pretty well been completed. Thank you to all the volunteers who have helped this year.

The volunteers for the month of June have been lined up. The Museum will be open Monday to Friday from 1-4 pm. Stop in and have a visit and see the changes to the displays.

Dorothy Blunden, our curator has been busy re-arranging and up-dating the permanent displays.

Jessie Lockhart and her display committee are creating a new display in the Legion Building to feature the Farmers Institute, Stockbreeders Association and other related groups which were supported by the early day settlers. Thank you to Doug Kipp at Lambert Kipp Pharmacy who gave us two eight foot glass display cases for exhibits.

Thank you, too, to the Farmers Institute who gave us Norman M. Marples Memorial money to create this display.

We have applied to the Provincial Archives in Victoria to have the Minute Books and other written material of the Windermere District Farmers Institute returned to our archives. When this arrives we will be able to add more information to this new display.

We will be having Grade Two classes from throughout the district visit the Museum during the last week in May. They are given demonstrations and information by volunteers from the Historical Society. The program was a great success last year.

Plans are in place for “**Writing with Fire**”, the branding party set for our summer opening, June 7. Fifty plus invitations have been sent out to local farmers and ranchers to bring their branding irons to have them recorded at the Museum. A program of fun and games has been arranged.

Many thanks to the Tuesday evening volunteers who have worked all winter plugging away at the mountain of paper work at the Museum.