

VALLEY HISTORY

AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 342-9769 MAY, 1998

NORTHEAST KOOTENAY MINES ATTRACTING MUCH ATTENTION 1926:

After lying dormant for a quarter of a century, Northeast Kootenay is attracting much attention on account of its mining possibilities. This was the first portion of the province to be actively prospected as Golden became the “jumping off place” for easterners attracted by the reports of mineral discoveries in B.C., these men following the construction of the CPR which was halted for some time there, pending the completion of the road through Rogers Pass.

Among the pioneers were two notable prospectors from Nova Scotia - Archie McMurdo and John McRae. McMurdo traversed the country from the Columbia River to the summit of the Selkirks, and located several prospects which were afterwards sold for high prices. Among these were the **Robert E. Burns**, a gold quartz location, and the **International**, on which occur deposits of silver and lead, at the head of the middle fork of the Spillimachene, now mapped as Bobbie Burns Creek.

It is related that when the storekeeper at Golden asked him to pay his account for the season's grubstake McMurdo would disappear for a few days and return with a poke of gold sufficient to clean up his bills and leave him a bit ahead. People tried to follow him on his trips but he was always wary and when he found he was being watched, even by his own relatives, he always gave them the slip. He died without disclosing the location of his source of wealth. For many years prospectors have been endeavoring to discover his “lost mine”, but so far without success.

John McRae's scene of operations was in the Columbia valley, near the confluence of the Spillimachene and Columbia Rivers. Here

he located, on June 12 and October 28, 1890, respectively, the **Simcoe** and **Toronto** claims, on which were outcrops of silver-lead ore. He built the first smelter in British Columbia. The writer saw it when it was being dismantled to supply stone for building the bridge over the Spillimachene River. McRae believed all he had to do was to melt the ore, extract the silver, as lead was no value in those days, and his fortune was made. He used charcoal for fuel. Like most amateur smelters this one refused to work according to schedule and dispelled another prospector's dream.

On the **Giant** Mine across the river from the site of the McRae smelter, the writer found an old gunbarrel, said to have been used by Indians or Hudson's Bay trappers for moulding the lead bullets they cast from the crude ore. The Giant is another of the pioneer locations in East Kootenay, having been staked on September 17, 1894 by the late Capt. F.P. Armstrong. The ore is almost a pure lead sulphide, with merely nominal silver values, in a barite gangue occurring as bands in limestone over a width of 135 feet. After lying idle for nearly twenty years this old mine is being reopened.

On Bugaboo Creek, south of it, an English company has taken up an old zinc prospect, developed originally about thirty years ago, and since lying practically idle. On Forster Creek a New York syndicate had been developing the **Lead Queen**, with the result that ore has been proved for a vertical depth of 2500 feet, and a width of 7 feet.

The **Steele Group**, which is an extension of the Lead Queen mineral zone, is about to be reopened by a syndicate of prominent Vancouver citizens. This mine made the remarkable performance three years ago of shipping seven carloads of ore from grass-roots.

Still going south, Horsethief Creek is the next important tributary of the Columbia

River. Here a Portland syndicate has been developing a promising silver-lead property while W. Heap Holland, a British cotton manufacturer has taken up and has been developing the **Phoenix Group**, from which remarkably rich specimens of ore have been exhibited.

On Toby Creek are many promising prospects and one shipping mine of old standing. The **Paradise Mine** has been a producer for over a quarter of a century. The ore is unique for this province in that it consists mainly of sand carbonates, characteristic of the silver-lead deposits of Mexico.

(the author and source of this article from the archives is unknown.)

**Information related by Ed Johnston,
August, 1922, for the Vancouver
Province:**

“What a West it was (with a sigh), in the days when we were young. West of Mississippi the plains to Saskatchewan were black with buffalo and the whisky-runners and free traders were filling every boat on the Missouri-Mississippi with deckloads of their hides. First killed for meat, then for its robe, and lastly as a means to confine the Indians to reserves, the noble beast was almost extinct when I came to B.C. They crossed the Rockies, too, further south, where the range is broken; up here even, I have found their skulls, mostly of old bulls driven out by the younger ones. Buffalo meant wolves, thousands of them, and they were a dreadful plague to the first cattle man. All the northwest states and this province were, before the CPR came through, in the eighties, a placer miners’ and cattle raisers’ home with only stopping places on travelled pack-train routes; and though there was a boundary line, it meant little to the stampede and packers until customs officers were placed on it.”

“**Delphine**, the famous wife of George Starke, first white woman prospector in the Kootenays, died but last summer, but she will be remembered for long in the high peak and glorious glacier named in her honour. It lies just behind David Thompson’s Mount Nelson, which you can see in the near distance guarding

this lake of his first fort west of the Rockies. George Starke was a fine fellow, worthy of such a wife. He was born in Quebec in 1854, coming west in 1880. From 1882 he made this valley his home. He met Delphine in Golden in 1894 and took a liking to her. She wasn’t ready to marry, however, and West Kootenay, at the time, being stirring they both, separately, saw much of it. They met again at Pilot Bay in 1895 where George renewed his suit. This time she took him and they were married in Nelson in 1896. The following year they returned to this valley, coming over by Wells or (now) Earl Grey Pass, and purchasing the Morigeau claim. George re-christened it, as he did most things and places, the ‘**Delphine**’. He built the first hotel at Windermere, Wilmer, Athalmer and Invermere and his help and hope of success was ever ‘Delphine’.

“When I sold my original location (Elkhorn Ranch) to Hon. Fred Aylmer in 1884 I established the ‘**Hog Ranch**’ and George Starke joined me there. But wait a minute, let me tell this experience first. Canyon Creek, like Toby, a feeder of the Columbia, was the scene of a rush in 1864 by the miners from Wild Horse. Few reached it, the season being unseasonable for a stampede. In 1884 came some buffalo hunters into this valley and reported finding gold in Canyon Creek. With Tom Lildeck and Jeff Adams, I made for it, and it paid about an ounce a day, above the Pot Hole, for a time. If the records are looked up, the Discovery claim may bear my name.

(“Discovery claim, Canyon Creek is recorded May 9, 1884, in the names of John A. and Chalmers C. McKay and E.T. Johnston) With varying fortune we prospected Two-Mile and Quartz creeks, my partners being Archie McMurdo, Bob Mathers and John McKay; and in each case we were discovery claim holders. However, the strikes were not exciting enough to keep us at them; so we went our ways to other things and places.

DID YOU KNOW?

Various names for the Elkhorn Ranch:

“Brighthouse” owned by Colin McKay
“Big House” or “Big Hoose” owned by Jones

“Rogers’ Ranch” owned by Rogers
“Juniper Hill” owned by Rosell
“Windermere Experimental Farm”

NEWSCLIPS FROM “VALLEY NEWS”

December 1945:

“Revenue to the Game Warden’s office at Invermere in trophy fees is \$25,000 more than last year. The district has experienced a record year for hunters, an unprecedented number having come from all parts of Canada and the U.S. Limit bags have been obtained by most hunters as the early winter and deep snow drove the game down from the higher levels. Elk in particular have been more than usually plentiful and it is reported that hundreds have been bagged in the valley.”

November 1945:

“A deal of interest in Windermere is the purchase by Vaughan Kimpton from Alexander Ritchie of Invermere of the old Windermere Race Course, known as the Clark Place, which adjoins the Windermere Townsite. This property which joins the Kimpton Estate gives Mr. Kimpton considerable frontage on Lake Windermere.”

November 1945, Edgewater:

“The Christmas tree business is in full swing with G. Ferguson in charge of this district, while E. Boker has charge of the whole district for Kirk & Co., with his headquarters at Invermere. E. Johnson is inspecting here and Mr. Beamish is hauling.”

March 1943, Canal Flat:

“The Solid Fuel Control project of salvaging tie ends and lumber waste in the Canal Flat vicinity for the past two years closed down this month with completion of the Marwell Construction Co.’s contract. As orders come in, shipments from the 40,000 cord slab stockpile standing in the Canal Flat depot will continue with local men and trucks on the job. In operation for emergency fuel for the past couple of years, the project has supplied city emergency stockpiles for many Western Canadian centres. All this winter’s shipments went to Saskatchewan.”

January, 1944:

“In an article by Vicountess Byng of Vimy in the January issue of Chatelaine, Lady Byng describes in part a trip to the Paradise Mine with the late Hon. Randolph Bruce.

‘When we stayed with Hon. Randolph Bruce, Lieut.-Governor of B.C., he took me on a two day visit to Paradise Mine - a wonderful trip in spite of a hazardous drive over an extremely narrow mountain road, which frankly frightened me and determined me to walk the five miles down when we returned - which I did! But the setting of Paradise Mine fully lived up to its name, for I never saw a lovelier place. Stillness brooded over it, and there were only the sounds of birds or mountain marmots seated at the entrance to their burrows.’ Lady Byng went on to described the profusion of wild flowers which delighted her on this trip.”

MR. & MRS. HARRY SYKES

By Helen (Sykes) Bryant

“Mr. and Mrs. Harry Sykes came to Spillimacheen (Galena) from Ontario in July, 1929. They came by way of the Kicking Horse Trail in a one ton truck. They stayed at the Golden Lodge which was owned and operated by Mr. E. Valentine. My father worked and freighted out of Golden for the Ruth Vermont Mine and for the Giant Mascot Mines.

They purchased their 160 acres farm in December, 1930 from Mary J. McIntosh whose house had previously burned. I was born in Calgary and then we moved to the farm. We lived in an old building that had been a chicken house until Dad was able to skid the logs down with horses and build a log house. This took many years to furnish. They grew a large garden, milked cows and raised chickens to live. Mother traded vegetables from the garden to stores for groceries.

These stores included those owned by J.S. Blakley at Spillimacheen; Rolston at Golden; Thos. Alton at Parson. Mr. Bert Beamish of Edgewater was in the trucking business and hauled produce to Banff. They sold a lot of produce to the Silver Basin Mining Syndicate, operating in the vicinity of the Bugaboo Ski Lodge. Trips were made by horse and wagon with Bill Romaine at the reins.

Dad and the neighbors would cut ice under the bridge, by hand, then use tongs to pull the blocks up a board to a sleigh pulled by horses. They took the blocks to the ice house where they were packed in sawdust to use in the summer to keep meat and butter cool.

In 1935-36, the farmland was just too dry, so Dad decided he had to get irrigation down. He went to the Forster Ranch (Firlands) to buy some old wooden flumes from Mr. Forster to carry water down to irrigate the hay land. To transport this pipe he decided to put all the small wooden pipe inside the larger ones, make a raft, and float it down the Columbia River to Spillimacheen. When the pipes arrived, he built sleighs or sloops on the river bank and skidded the pipe on these up to the ditch using horses. With one horse he ploughed a ditch in which to lay the pipe. In some places he had to blast rock. He joined all the pipes together and tied them in place with wire to tree trunks or big rocks. In a couple of years he had water running. The original ditch is still in use. Some of the wooden pipe has rotted away and is replaced with 8" aluminum pipe.

Father applied for water rights from Washout Creek in 1938. He cleared more land and ploughed the fields with horses and seeded them to hay to feed more cattle. In later years they shipped cream to the Columbia Valley Creamery Assoc. of Golden.

Dad prospected in claims just west of Parson. At the time of his death he held claims of copper, gold and silver. He worked on these claims until the year before his death. My father was also a big game guide.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE MUSEUM.

Three carloads of Historical Society members made the trip to Creston to visit the Museum there on March 20. It was a lovely day and the Museum was enjoyed by all.

The display committee is busy freshening up displays and preparing for the summer opening. Volunteers will be called upon for the annual spring cleaning.

Our thanks to the Invermere Rotary Club for our new vault for the Archives. We will now be contacting long-time residents of the valley for photos and information. There are many families for whom we have no information. If you have artifacts, photos, family histories or other items of interest that you would like preserved in the museum, now is the time. Please don't wait!! Contact Jaryl McIsaac - 342-6892; Dorothy Blunden - 342-2005 or the Museum and leave a message on the answering machine 342-9769. Thank you.