

VALLEY HISTORY

AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

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THE STORY OF EDGEWATER

by Berta Moore

from the Valley Echo Special Edition
1980

No doubt the beginning of Edgewater stems from the year 1886 when at the time of the completion of the main line of the CPR, James L. McKay came into the Valley from Golden. He realized its potential possibilities, and that a railway would soon be built. In fact, in 1892, in the 55th year of her reign, Queen Victoria gave a Crown Grant to the Columbia and Kootenay Railway and Navigation Co. But it was many years later before the Kootenay Central Railway was incorporated and really got into action.

Jim McKay bought about 15,000 acres of land from the government from Sinclair Creek along the Columbia River to Luxor. He sent for his father and his family, and established the 'McKay Estate' now 'Upper Ranch.'

He was married in 1900 and in 1907 built the large white house there for \$10,000, which we understood was an 'Eaton House'.

But probably the first settlers in Edgewater were the Munsons. Harry Munson ran a small stopping place and eating house, near the bottom of Hewitt Road (as it is now known).

John W. McNeill homesteaded lot 7569, Crown granted in 1909. Dave and Fred Larmour had the DL Ranch, later owned by Eric Smith and by him renamed the U5 Ranch. Larmour's house was likely one of the first 'prefab' houses around. It was an 'Eaton House' built after 1915.

In 1908, Dr. W.H. Gaddes, well-known veterinarian and land developer, came into the Valley with Ebbs Canavan, to look over McKay's holdings.

In 1911 construction of the railway got underway from both Golden and the Fort Steele ends. In 1911 a Columbia Valley syndicate bought out McKay, and in 1911 a comprehensive survey was done by H.W.E. Canavan on this property. It showed great prospects for settlement.

In 1912 the Columbia Valley Orchards had great plans for the future of this area. The Kelowna Irrigation Co. moved 15 men and 10 teams with wagons, etc. by CPR to Golden. From there they travelled 2 1/2 days to Edgewater. They found a

'good forest' and an old log cabin. They built on to it, with a canvas roof, for a cookhouse, and slept in tents. "The mosquitoes were terrible." They worked 10 hours a day and were paid \$50.00 a month and board. They ploughed roads and cut down trees. A sawmill was built above camp, and lumber sawed for the irrigation flume and 2 dams - the starting of Edgewater.

The townsite was surveyed in 1912. A post office was established in 1913. Some settlers came in from Britain. But with streets laid out and plans made for the town, the 1914 was put an end to everything. Most of the men left for overseas. The Company went into bankruptcy in 1915.

In 1918 the population was only 30. Smith, Larmour, and Thompson are the only names on the list still known here, or have descendants living here.

In 1922 Dr. Gaddes "picked up the pieces", buying the land from the Executor of the defunct Dominion Trust. Dr. Gaddes, Dr. Thomson, and Herbert Geddes formed the Columbia Valley Ranches, incorporated in 1923. The company planned to bring settlers in from Europe. A number came from Germany and later, from Denmark.

By 1927 the population was 60, in 1928, 200. School classes were held in a small building on the McKay Ranch, but closed in 1922. A grant from Victoria helped build a log school on the U5 Ranch, Miss Mary Smith was the teacher. About 1928 school was moved into the little town hall. A few years later a proper school was built.

The company gave land for a church and a community hall. These were built by community effort, plus a grant for the Anglican Church in 1931 and 1936 respectively. In 1942 there was a large general store in town, owned by W. Blair, and Mrs. Hansen had the Post Office in her house.

In 1946 Dr. Gaddes sold out and retired. The remaining town lots plus some acreage around the town were bought by Harry Moore, who had been asked by the C.V.O. to bring his mill in, in 1942. He also bought the town water system, along with two others, H. Neville Smith, and Bill Harrison. Since he had already been responsible for a good deal of repair work on the system, this made little difference. However, Mrs. Hansen said it was not fair he should bear this expense, so the Water and Light District was formed. They just took over looking after the water

and charged people for it. including Moore's mill and buildings. They bought Moore's light plant, which supplied power to some 30 houses by this time. Eventually, B.C. Hydro came in and took over the power supply.

Reichwold Flag at Windermere

Invermere, Oct. 7 (date of clip unknown)

“The first flagpole to be erected in the Reichwold forest in Germany following V-E Day flew a Red Ensign which now flies proudly against a background of evergreen forest in the Windermere valley.

The flag was brought here by George D. Curtis, formerly a Captain with the 30th Coy. Canadian Forestry Corps, who cut the pole in the Reichwold forest upon which to fly it. Captain Curtis raised the flag near the end of May, 1945. The thrills of V-E Day were over and the dangers to the Allied forces which had prohibited previous flying of flags in territory so close to the enemy, were over too. It seemed fitting that the flag of victory should fly over the forest but none was available. An appeal for a Union Jack brought a small flag from the Y.M.C.A. Afterwards a larger flag was obtained from the Canadian Legion Auxiliary Services and it is this Red Ensign which is a bright banner against the rugged beauty of the Windermere valley flying on the K-2 ranch, which was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Curtis this spring.”(Mrs. Curtis was local lawyer for many years.

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOUR

from The Valley Echo

MARINA LEEDS

Mrs. Ben Leeds is not just a summer resident. She lived here as a child and has happy memories of this valley that she and her husband think now “is paradise”.

Her story starts in Russia where her father had been an officer in the White Army, and that accounts for the delightfully soft accent in which Mrs. Leeds recounted details of her life. He was very keen about languages so he left the

army to take a seven-year course in Oriental languages in Vladivostok. That was in 1900 and he returned to Russia in 1907.

Then he married and went back to Manchuria. Mrs. Leeds, who was born Marina Dmitrieff, remembers holidays in China and her mother has told her of an earthquake they experienced when holidaying in Nagasaki, later one of the H-bomb cities.

Communism was already filtering into Manchuria and Mr. Dmitrieff worried about the future, so in 1925 they left Harbin, China, where they were living, and came to Canada under a CPR immigration project that brought them to Invermere.

There were about thirty in the party of 10 families that arrived under this scheme and they were housed in the old Athalmer Hotel. The idea was that all the families establish themselves on Valley farms but gradually the others left and only the Dmitrieffs remained. They had purchased the J.S. Johnston property, “Comfort Ranch” in the Paddy Ryan Lakes area. Marina attended the local school, learning English as she was hurried through the primary grades to her own age-level grade.

But the market was poor. Mr. Dmitrieff had a stroke and his wife found conditions too difficult for farming. Accustomed to many servants in China, it was hardship for her to milk a cow, bake her own bread, and cook three meals a day, drive a team and do much of the work of the farm as well as the house.

In 1928 they left for Calgary. As Mr. Dmitrieff was unable to work after his stroke his wife worked hard and brought up Marina, an only child. Her father died in 1932.

Marina went through normal school. She taught three years near Claresholm and later was on the Calgary city staff.

Then she met her husband. Ben Leeds was an Englishman, a meteorologist with the RAF, and they were married in January 1944. Curiously, Aubrey L. Young of Invermere was a mate of his in the RAF and now they are neighbours in their Lake Windermere homes.

Mrs. Leeds has another happy link with the Valley. As a child she entered exhibits of berries and handicrafts in the Fall Fair. Now

she is back as judge of the Art and Handicraft section.

Did You Know That:

The first moving picture show in the Windermere District was held at Athalmer, March 15, 1912.

The first sawmill for the valley came up on the steamboat in 1898 and was erected at Athalmer (the Salmon Beds) and operated by Jim McKay. The second mill was erected about three years later at Wilmer and was operated by George Stark.

The first newspaper in the valley was The Outcrop published at Wilmer in 1900. The Outcrop lasted until 1910 and in July 1911 The Columbian was published at Wilmer. It lasted only a few numbers and was followed in September 1912 by The Columbia Valley Times published at Athalmer. This paper appeared regularly for three years.

JOKERS CAUSED REAL PANIC

By C. A. Hayden

from "Rediscovering British Columbia"

Every now and again, Rufe Kimpton chuckles and when this happens, expect a jest, even perchance at his own expense.

"I was the chief sufferer, and I mean sufferer, although I can laugh at it now, in about the funniest incident in my experience," he said. "Billy West, a one-armed chap, had gone on the rampage, spent his money and was broke to the world. He came into Johnny Connor's bull-pen of a saloon in Golden - I was there doing some collecting - and wanted a drink.

"They wouldn't serve him - told him to get out. He said he was sick and had to have a bracer but that made no difference. He had to get out."

"Billy ran into Chan McKay, who was a daredevil if there ever was one. Chan had been up-country doing some mining and had some dynamite and fuses left over. Billy told him his

tale of woe and Chan said he'd fix things all right."

"So he got him an old broom handle, cut off a piece the length of a stock of dynamite, bored a hold in one end for the fuse and fitted over it the dynamite wrapper. It looked like the real thing for a fare-ye-well.

"Now, says Chan to Billy, 'go into Connor's place, and if they refuse to give you a drink, light the fuse and toss the stock at them.'"

"I was leaning against a pool table and there was quite a crowd in the saloon when Billy came in. He did as Chan had told him, was refused a drink and then he told them he was going to blow them all to hades, took the lighted cigar from his mouth, touched off the fuse and heaved the stick behind the bar."

"Johnny Connors went clean through the windows taking the sash with him. Everybody started for the door at once. I hit for the back door but it was just my luck that everyone followed.

"Every man jack of those fellows who stuck out for that door jumped on me. I used to dress pretty horsey those days. Had a light suit with loud checks, a hard hat and yellow shoes. Everything was ruined. Every time I'd try to scramble to my knees, two or three of them would jump on me --- that's what they were doing, jumping from one place to another and mighty hard too. The suit was a ruin, the hat was worse and even my boots were spoiled.

"I protected my face but my hands were cut to ribbons almost. See the scars." (They were evident enough). "Well that was Chan McKay and Billy West."

"I was the last to get out and I was sore and bruised all over but still able to make good time to the river bank where I found the gang waiting to see the saloon go up."

"Well, we waited for quite a while and there was no explosion. Some of the fellows began to smell a rat but they were not any too sure, so we waited for a while longer. Then we tiptoed back to the saloon and there were Billy and Chan with a keg of liquor on the bar going for it for all they were worth."

"It was one on the gang and talk about your sprees that followed. It was certainly a stemwinder."

Medora Wardlaw Forster

101 Years of Age

from TODAYS SENIOR

January 5, 1987

According to Mrs. Medora Wardlaw Forster, 101 years of age, arriving in Penticton amidst fireworks, festivities, and gay celebrations, did not mean she was getting the key to the city. It meant it was July's fire cracker day, but what a fitting way to begin what has turned out to be 55 years of outstanding community involvement in Penticton.

Born in Gault, Ontario, Medora moved extensively until she met Harold Forster, her husband, who settled her on his 7000 acre ranch in Wilmer on the Columbia River. There they had 3 children. When it came time to educate them, Mrs. Forster moved to Penticton with them.

Upon settling in Penticton, Medora immediately joined the W.A. where she became the president. She also became a dominant figure in Mrs. Fisher's Penticton Ladies Choir, with whom she sang for many years until she joined the ST. Saviour's Choir where she remained for 32 years. Medora also took her place on the line at the packing house for the Penticton Cooperative Growers for 8 years during the war. Alive and well in her own apartment on Bruinswick Street, where she lives with her daughter Frances Yoland, Medora says "except for the beaver fever, all is well in my life, and I would like to send out my best wishes to all the wonderful friends that have touched my life. I love you all - with a special thanks to my daughter Frances."

(One of our early pioneers that we can be proud of!)

What's New At The Museum

*** The Annual Heritage Luncheon was held at Radium this year and we will be highlighting the history of Radium and Edgewater. We will have some of the locals give the history and we appreciate their help. Thank you to Dorothy Brown for organizing the catering and thank you to all who helped in any way. This has become a popular event and we thank all those who come to join us year after year.

*** The Tuesday night work bees continue to accomplish great things. The important thing is that they have fun and enjoy what they are doing. Thanks gang!!

*** Acquisition continue to arrive regularly. Jenny Weir recently donated the suitcase that her father, William Weir, brought to Wilmer when he came in 1911. She also gave a songbook with lyrics written by John Murray Gibbon who had the farm on Peter's Hill that was managed by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Peters. Gibbon was publicity agent for the CPR and had a log holiday home on the property. He and his family came from Montreal for many years to stay there. It burned down.

*** As we look toward spring, we are planning: field trips, spring cleaning at the Museum, changes and sprucing-up of displays, school tours..... If you are interested in helping with any of these things, let Dorothy Blunden, our curator, know by leaving a message on the answering machine at the Museum or by contacting her. Your help would be much appreciated!