

VALLEY HISTORY

AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 342-9769 FEBRUARY 2000

From the Files of B.G. Hamilton Nov.5. , 1923.

Prior to the year 1900, there was but little development in the trough of the Columbia- Kooteney Rivers outside of the settlement around Golden in the North and Fort Steele to the south. Cranbrook was just commencing to take an importance as a divisional point of the C.P.R. on their Crowsnest Branch. Between these two places, a rough distance of 166 miles, there were few people, if any, engaged in the serious pursuit of agriculture save Mr. McKay Sr. at Sinclair Creek, Harold E. Forester on Number Two Creek and the holdings of the "Big Hoose Ranch" immediately to the east of Windermere. These efforts were largely confined to the raising of cattle and horses. The only other settlers of any moment in the territory outside the settlement of Windermere were the people who kept roadhouses. With this lucrative employment they combined such agricultural efforts as were necessary to maintain a sufficient number of cattle, pigs, poultry and such animals as would supply the wants of passersby. "

B.G. Hamilton was an enterprising young man who was instrumental in establishing businesses in the community in the early 1900's. He was born Basil George Hamilton on October 14, 1869 in Eastern Canada. From 1890-93, he was an agent for the C.P.R. and Hudson Bay Company. For

five years, until 1898 he worked with the C.P.R. Land Department in Winnipeg. He was the brother of L.A. Hamilton, former commissioner of C.P.R. lands. In 1898 he was in charge of a party for the C.P.R. determining classification and natural resources of land grant of Columbia and Kootenay Railway and Navigation Company which had been surveyed in blocks of two miles square, many of them being in the Windermere Mining Division of British Columbia. He married Maude Crawford on June 29, 1907 in Winnipeg. They lived in Calgary until moving to Wilmer B.C. in 1910, at which point, he left the C.P.R. to join the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruitlands Ltd. .

B.G. Hamilton was a Notary Public and he had the first insurance office in the valley. He was secretary to the Farmers Association and advisory to the Fall Fair. He was secretary to the Board of Trade in 1912. He was monumental in establishing "Kootenae House" site as the David Thompson Memorial. Mr. Hamilton was Secretary -Treasurer, valuator, and adjuster for the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruitlands LTD. until June 1921. He was instrumental in building the first Anglican church in the Valley. He was an Historian and a newspaper man.

Mr. Hamilton wrote volumes on the construction of the Banff - Windermere Highway. From his files- September 18, 1922.....

What was practically the turning of the last sod in the construction of the Banff- Windermere Road took place on Friday 15, of September 1922. Much of the work had been finished by the early part of the week. On Sunday Sept. 17, 1922, Mr. J.M. Wardle, Chief Engineer in charge of construction started off from Banff to make the first through run by automobile. He passed over the Bow River Bridge at nine in the morning and reached the Invermere Hotel at an actual traveling time of seven hours. His instrument showed the distance to be 104 miles, or 91 miles to Sinclair Hot Springs from Banff.

As far as the Windermere Mining Division was concerned very many properties had been taken up and partially developed but no serious work was done save possibly the efforts of the owners of the Paradise Group and the Ptarmigan. The cost of putting their ores on the smelting market were however so high as to make the further carrying on of the work prohibitive. Much prospecting was constantly being done and it was known that the country was full of mineral.

The above facts and the tried-out possibilities of the country (particularly in the growing of potatoes, let it be mentioned incidentally) induced some local persons residing to the south to obtain a provincial charter for a line of railway. Dr. Watt of Elko was one of the promoters and was helped by Mr. R.L.T. Galbraith, of Fort Steele. The final result was that the C.P.R. acquired some working interest and about 1904 started work under the charter and actually built the dump and laid 17 miles of steel out of

Golden. The head of steel reached Spillimachene in 1913, Edgewater in 1914 and was completed and opened for traffic on the first day of January 1915.

**B.G. Hamilton
November 5, 1923.
Invermere, B.C.**

B.G. Hamilton was destined to become valley historian during his long residence in the Valley. His wife, Maude, shared his enthusiasm for community matters. Basil and Maude had no children. Mrs. Hamilton invited Kitty Walker to live with Basil and herself for a year, with a view to adoption if it was mutually agreeable after a test period. Kitty lived with the Hamiltons for a year and rebelled only when she learned that with adoption she would become "Katherine Hamilton". Being Kitty Walker meant more to her than changing her name to obtain this coveted education.

**From: Tales of the Windermere
W. A. Weir.**

Jessie Lockhart said she didn't know too much about B.G. Hamilton personally but she did work for him one summer when she was about 16. One of her duties was to go into the community and interview newcomers. She believes this is what sparked her interest in history.

September 22, 1929. Vancouver Province.

Mitzi calls on "THE MAN WHO KNOWS" By D.O. Reed Palmer (Mitzi herself)

"I told you in my last letter that I was going to interview B.G. Hamilton-The Man Who Knows- since every question asked about Invermere, Windermere, or Athalmer was disposed of by "Ask Mr. Hamilton, he'll know."

I marched across the main street of Invermere- wide and rather dusty- from the Hotel to Mr. Hamilton's office.

"Good morning," I chirped over his office barrier, all set to tell him about myself and the 'Province' when he took the wind out of my sails by answering in that characteristically quick way of his. "Good morning, I hear you got some interesting pictures of Mr. Bruce at his home this morning."

There he was, in character, "The Man who Knows" for lo!- it was not yet an hour since I returned from Pynelogs with Mr. Fisher, the photographer.

An old Newspaperman himself, Mr. Hamilton was most helpful in giving me all the information about the district I wanted, for he has a huge filing cabinet bulging in every drawer with 50,000 words or 500,000- I forget which- he has written himself about the Windermere District. It is his hobby, and his delight and probably no-one else has so much historical data or facts about the Kooteney District stored away- not only in the filing cabinet, but at his fingertips.

He told me how Athalmer came by it's name, after Fred Aylmer; how his Honor the Lieutenant-Governor named Invermere, taking 'Inver' from his native Scottish tongue, 'mouth of' the lake, and further back in pioneer days- 1882, to be

precise (and Mr. Hamilton is most precise with his dates), Gilbert Malcolm Sproat was sent by the Provincial Government to make an examination of the district, "and coming on the beautiful stretch of water on September 4, 1883", Sproat called it Windermere, from its "fancied resemblance to the Lake of that name in England," said Mr. Hamilton.

You see? -- it is just as simple and easy as that. He knows every date and event of importance, and speaks of them with as much ease as a bond salesman quoting you "bids" and "asked."

"You're worse than Bruce McKelvie when it comes to historical stuff and pioneers," I complimented him.

"Oh no," he answered quickly, "McKevie has made a study of the whole province, while I have contented myself with this district."

Mr. Hamilton was the local correspondent to many newspapers. He interviewed natives in the valley and recorded their stories. He wrote about the paddle-wheelers, the highways, the mines, the logging and the agricultural developments in the district.

In January 1916, he told the Vancouver Province,

"Other interests that will be brought forward with the close of the war are the mountain climbing opportunities; there are a countless number of still unscaled peaks over 10,000 feet in height. The scenic possibilities of the valley are marvelous, then there are nature's springs of hot medicinal waters."

Historical information about the Farmers Institute, banks, churches, hospitals, and hotels can be found at the museum in the B.G. Hamilton files.

What's Happening at the Museum.....

The membership enjoyed a very interesting talk on " Traplines" at their January meeting. The speaker, Bill Dubois, talked about the pioneer trappers in the valley. Albert Cooper assisted Bill.

The Millennium Committee has been meeting regularly . The project, a "bronze sculpture" of David Thompson has been well received with many letters of support from the community. We have applied for a grant from the Canadian Pacific Heritage Fund.

" Wings over the Rockies" will be May 8 - May 14. The Museum will be open during that week from 1p.m. to 4 pm. If you know anyone that is interested in displaying their collections at the museum, let Dorothy Blunden know.

The Bud Cleland Memorial Fund is to be spent on a sound system for the museum. This will allow us to play soft music throughout the building.

The general meeting on March 17, at 2 p.m. will have Peter Christensen as guest speaker. He will speak on books written about the Columbia River.

1911.....A SOCIAL EVENT

January 13-15

Golden skips were Tom King and Harry Parson. Cranbrook and the newly formed Athalmer Club were present. Tom Barry skipped the Athalmer rink. Wilmers rinks were

skipped by George Bennett, William Weir and Ed Tunnacliffe.

A Smoker Concert was held in the Orange Hall as a grand finale. The hall had been decorated for the occasion

Ed Tunnacliffe and Charles Crook provided music for dancing. The Smoker waxed merry with songs and dancing and speeches until the curlers departed for home and much needed sleep

1917....A PATRIOTIC DANCE

A Patriotic Dance on St. Patricks day was held in the Athalmer Hall. It was got up by the Teamster of the Paradise Mine in conjunction with the Soldiers Comfort Club of Athalmer. The proceeds went to the Soldiers Comfort for the benefit of the men at the front.

An orchestra consisting of 5 violins, mandolin, and piano gave their services free. About 150 people were present for the dancing. One pleasing item on the program was the Sword Dance performed by Arthur Newton in full Highland costume.

Proceeds of the event were \$98.10. "Lights out" was at 4 a.m. and everyone went home.

Information from " Tales of The Windermere" by Winn Weir. .