

# VALLEY HISTORY

## AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

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



From: The Lake Windermere Valley  
Echo: Thursday, October 2, 1975.

### Lake Windermere Station Athalmer, B. C.

“In 1913 the final contracts were let on the Kootenay Central Railway. Three and a half million dollars worth of work was to be carried out by Spokane contractor, “Burns and Jordan.” The firm employed 2000 men, 6 steam shovels in 20 camps and track laying machines. In the same year, the rails were laid from Golden to Spillimacheen . During this time, the steamboats were still active on the Columbia River. P. Armstrong built the steamer “ E.P. Armstrong” for Burns and Jordan. The steamer was used between 1913-1915 for transporting the materials for railway construction. This boat later sank near Fairmont.

In January 1914, the northern part of the railway was within 20 miles of Athalmer. In August of the same year, the local residents had a controversy over the future stations name at Athalmer.

Between the years 1913-1914, train stations were built at Canal Flats, Fairmont, Firlands, Brisco, Spillimacheen and Parson.

The first station on the shores of Lake Windermere was small..... just big enough to hold a ticket office and baggage office. Two

retired wooden boxcars, painted red, served as a storage room and freight shed. The station was named “ Lake Windermere Station” and was opened for business in December 1914.

On January 1, 1915, the first scheduled regular train pulled into Lake Windermere Station. It was a cold, bleak, foggy morning. Gus Erickson , Divisional Superintendent from Cranbrook was in command. The passengers were soldiers enroute to World War 1.

In 1923 a new station was built made of heavy round logs. The first Station Master was Mr. Kelly.

In 1978 the Lake Windermere Valley Echo reports  
“ Built in 1923 for \$7,000.00 , the Station is relatively unique in its ornamental design. Only two others of it’s type exist in Canada. One is in storage at Heritage Park in Calgary. The old C.P.R. Station will soon be internally transformed from an empty log shell into a new Valley Museum. The building was bought for \$1.00 by the Historical Society and moved to its present location in December, 1975. It has since undergone exterior restoration.”

(Album D27, Museum Files.)

**“Lake Windermere Station”**  
**by : Josephine ( Kelly) McLeod.**

My father, William Lewis Kelly, was the first Telegraph Operator and Station Agent

of the Lake Windermere Station at Athalmer, B.C. He trained two young men to be telegraph operators, Frank Smith and Mike Talariko. They stayed until their training was completed.

My father and mother, Catherine E. Kelly and my elder brother, Lewis A. Kelly, moved to Athalmer in 1916 from McGillvery B.C. (Near Cranbrook and Moyie.) Previously, father had worked for the Chicago-Milwakiie Railroad in Spokane, Washington. He served in the position as Station Agent and Telegraph Operator at Lake Windermere Station from 1916 until October 1935. He then retired and moved with his family to Vancouver, B.C. The family consisted of my parents, my younger brother Edwin, and myself. Our older brother, Lewis, remained in the Windermere Valley where he worked, married and raised his family of five children. He passed away in Cranbrook in 1982.

Our family has great memories of “Our Dad’s Station”. We would stop by on our way home from school numerous times and sit at one of Dad’s big desks and do homework.. Dad was busy in his chair in front of the low window transmitting messages on the telegraph key.

We also have numerous recollections of the cold snowy winter nights hearing the train whistle blowing its “eerie” sound as it traveled and echoed along the shores of Lake Windermere to Lake Windermere Station. A memorable occasion for the town’s schoolchildren was to be at the station at the end of summer to get a “glimpse” of the new teachers arriving by train. We were also fascinated with the large waiting room at Dad’s station. It had shiny, varnished, rolled benches circling the room and a large potbellied stove for heat. Dad would keep it well stoked up, often it was red hot. The benches were often occupied by the “hobos” who traveled free by train

during the Depression years. They came to warm up and rest on cold, snowy winter nights.

The leaded windows at the front of the Station made an added attraction to the building. We can still picture our Dad, busy at his telegraph key in his white shirt with black armbands.

My father passed away in January 1947 and my mother passed away March 15, 1966. Both in Vancouver. My brother Edwin and his wife Frances live in Parksville, B.C. Their family of three and extended families live in Cranbrook, Kelowna and Port Hardy. I live in Vancouver with my husband Arthur. Our family of four and their families all live in the surrounding areas.

We trust this letter and information will be an asset to the Museum and will be displayed with the history of the once elegant log building known as the Lake Windermere Station at Athalmer, B. C. Above all, give our Dad the Honor he deserves after serving so faithfully in his capacity as Agent and Telegraph Operator for many long years.

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### **“Derailed Coal Cars Slam into Station.”**

**October 2, 1975**-Ten cars of a 105 car Northbound CPR coal train were derailed at the Athalmer Station at twenty minutes to seven Monday morning. The coal cars piled up on one another with one car smashing into the unique log station, completely demolishing the front of the building and the entire platform.

**May 13, 1976** - “With the wreck of the CPR Station and our subsequent acquisition of the Station, the “Save the Station” project entailed many extra meetings, time and energy in moving the station to its present site.

A very hearty vote of thanks was given to Arnor Larson in appreciation of all the hours of hard work . His efforts were instrumental in the Society for accomplishing so much.”

**March 17, 1977-** “ Work has begun again on the Athalmer Station re-construction, to the delight of the Historical Society. Funded by a grant, the log work is being done by Charles Lightfoot and John Blakley. Many of the original logs were salvaged after the train wreck that damaged the landmark, and Revelstoke saw mill has donated logs to replace those that were damaged too badly to use.”

**February 16,1978-** “ The old C.P.R Station will soon be internally transformed from an empty log shell into a new Valley Museum. The building was bought for \$1.00 by the Historical Society and moved to its present location in December, 1975. It has since undergone exterior restoration.”  
The building houses the Reception Area, Indian displays, Transportation displays, a Pioneer Parlor and other displays that are changed annually. Outside, on the east side of the building is the station wagon that was used to move freight, luggage and mail between the train and the station.

### **“ Valuable Rug to Be Ruffled”**

August 25, 1977

Mrs. Evelyn Walker of Invermere has been busy hooking a rug in aid of the “Station Project”, undertaken by the Windermere District Historical Society. The rug will be the winning prize for a raffle to be held in September. It is an unusual rug, in that the design depicts the Lake Windermere C.P.R. Station as it was in the 1920’s.

Mrs. Jill Dumontier from St. Albert , Alberta won the rug in a raffle in 1978. When she drove out to the Valley to pick it up she went to meet Ev and they had tea. Jill promised she would return the rug to the Museum one day. She said Ev was pleased about that. In September 2000 , she donated the rug back to the museum.

*The Lake*

*Windermere Valley Echo.*

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### **WING LEE STORE**

Wing Lee ran a Laundry, a restaurant and a boarding house in Wilmer across from the Town Hall and E.M.Taylor's store and next to what was the Imperial Bank. ( Now Mantyka's). A quote from the late Bror Carlson, “ Nerves in Wilmer were zapped for awhile after Wing Lee ran all around shooting helter skelter after a pig he wanted to slaughter.”

In Invermere Wing Lee ran his store from 1912-1946. It was a general store. He also had rooms for miners and teamsters.

“ There are in this world human beings unique unto themselves and Wing Lee is one of them. If there is another store in this world equal to his, I hope I shall not die before I see it.”

In mid-summer, when opening the door of Wing Lee's emporium, you will, if it is not your first visit, leave the door wide open, not because you may want to make a hasty retreat but because the accumulation of odorous gathered from month to month, nay year to year, is more savory mixed with oxygen from the outside world.

Turn first to the window. Last year sometime, Wing Lee ordered a variety of men's shoes. Most have been sold, but the odd pair is still there , so are the boxes in which the others were packed. Hanging above them is the empty banana stalk from

last month's bananas. Flanking them on one side are three tins of tobacco, a mans leather jacket, four tins of peaches, and a medley array of shoe laces, toothbrushes and a box of cigarette lighters. On the other side is a pair of red felt women's bedroom slippers, two boxes of soap, a carton of chewing tobacco, and a large round yellow cheese in the middle of which sits Wing Lee's mascot, a rather seedy looking Persian cat. That is the top layer. What is underneath I couldn't quite make out for the collection of empty boxes, wrapping paper, etc. that filled any vacant space.

When you grope your way into the door, there is standing room for only three people at once . As a new order of goods arrived the cases are laid inside the door and these are pushed back only to make room for the next lot. But ask Wing Lee for any article and if it is in the store, and dollars to doughnuts it is, he can go immediately to its resting place.

The boys go in for chocolate bars and shoe laces and write their own accounts in his book. Wing Lee never renders bills but occasionally will say, " You owe me so and so" and ten to one he is quite right. Government auditors take one look at his accounts and bid a hasty leave.

I repeat, if there is another store anywhere like it, I want to see it."

In 1946 Wing Lee's store was sold to Rudy Hecher who lived upstairs and also rented apartments. In 1960, the store was sold again to Murray Fisher, A. Cameron and A. Berg and was known as Valley Foods. Murray Fisher built a new store and it became a Super Value Store. This business was sold some years later to Todd Fisher, George Carr and Bob Conroy. The store was enlarged by the new owners and Tracy's Auto Body (Vandenbilche's ) was purchased for the expansion and torn down. In March 1984 the store became the I.G.A.

*From: The Winn Weir Files.*

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Thank you to the September Volunteers who kept the museum open during week-day afternoons.

On September 25, 2000, thirteen Elderhostal members, plus escorts from various points in the United States, visited the Museum. They had a treasure hunt and had to find answers to questions by exploring the Museum. There were prizes for the winners and they had an enjoyable day.

### **Statue Update**

With our latest donation, we are now at \$61,000.00. Wow! We are on our way! If you are interested in making a pledge, please write to:

David Thompson Millennium Project  
Box 2670  
Invermere, B.C. V0A1K0.