

**VALLEY HISTORY**  
**AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM**  
**BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 342-9769 August 2002**



**CHARLES DALLAS ELLIS**

Charlie Ellis was born on July 21, 1876 in the Eastern United States. He was a mountain climber, prospector, rancher, journalist and world traveller . In 1903 he was a night clerk at the Windermere Hotel which was owned by Jim Stoddart. It was there that he met Walter Stoddart who soon became his ranching partner. In 1905 they purchased the property belonging to Tom Jones and they named it the Ellenvale Ranch. ( Now known as the K-2 Ranch south of Invermere.) They did horse logging and raised and sold horses until they sold the Ranch to Captain and Mrs. A.H. McCarthy in 1921 for \$30,000.00.

In 1910, two Boston men, E.W. Harnden and Herbert Gleason, the latter a renowned photographer, both keen amateur mountaineers had become interested in this valley. They, along with Charlie Ellis organized an expedition to make the first ascent of Mt. Nelson. In the end, only Ellis made the summit. He put his record in a bottle and built a cairn to commemorate his achievement.

He was registrar of voters for Windermere for many years and he was a member of the Windermere District Board of Trade from 1917. He was an artist. He made mosaics from concrete, broken glass, and pottery. His work may be seen in St. Peters Church, Windermere and in the Windermere Cemetery.

As a journalist , he did considerable writing on the Valley. In later years he travelled around the world. He was visiting the daughter of his only brother John in San Bernardino, California when he died in March 1952.

*(Jaryl McIsaac Files)*

**“ THE STARS LOOK DOWN”**  
by C.D.Ellis

The telephone rang with an alarming note that was not quite the usual tone, or seemed not to be. Tom H. Taylor threw himself from his bunk, only half awake. I sat up. It had been a hard day following the long pipe line through the deep snow to caulk leaks in the air line. Tom stood by the wall, receiver to his ear. “Yes”, he repeated. The bright moon shone on his face and made it a ghostly palor. Pressure low, I thought, and me for the pipe line again. He hung up the receiver with a sigh. “One man killed and another seriously injured at the mine.” I hit the floor fully awake. “Tell Jim Johnston to hook up a couple of cayuses while I get the first aid kit ready”, he ordered. Rawhiding was not Jim’s job, but in cases of emergency it is not always the man in line of duty that the subconscious suggests, but the man whom among men stands out clearly, dependable, unselfseeking and ready. Jim is that sort and years have not dimmed that confidence.

The light of a midwinter moon in the Northern mountains at timber line and more than a mile above sea level has a spectral effect. The scattered trees, half buried buildings and over hanging craigs are magnified by their shadows. Jim Johnston and Tom Taylor moved up the trail, each leading a cayuse hitched to a rawhide, silent as their shadows that like ghosts of themselves , bent and swayed at every step. Only the occasional creak of the hide on the glistening snow or the snorting of horses, as they blew the frosty air in steam from their nostrils, broke the stillness. The trail led up the rock hidden snow covered basin nearly a mile to the elevation of 9000 feet to the portal of the mine. At the very end of the scrubby timber and half way between the compressor and the mine, was located the miners camp.

Since the beginning of time , McDonald Creek, the first South tributary of Horse Thief Creek , has lain open to sunshine, storm and sky,

defended by her surrounding peaks that anchor the fleeting clouds at 11,000 feet. Three years since in the search for gold, silver, and other base metals, Ben Abel, George Scott and .....Mutts, discovered and staked a group of claims, known as the "Red Line" and afterwards named the "Ptarmigan Mines." The magic wand of precious metals had in the meantime caused a road through the most difficult terrain to be built thirty miles from Wilmer to the mine and machinery to be installed, in hope of greater fortune to the owner and lucrative employment for labor. The pounding of the machines and exploding powder awoke the wilderness. Strange fate had gathered forty men from many distant points of the world. Three hours later in the New Year of 1903, the crunching of snow and voices announced the return of Tom and Jim from the mine. The telephone got busy, Superintendent Starbird of "Blowfly" was called. Dr. Robert Elliott of Wilmer was got on the wire – awakened of all mornings of the year - New Year with the story of tragedy and suffering– unfolded bit by bit.

The previous shift, in timing the fuse, had cut off a hole in the face, leaving a "boot-leg" of unexploded dynamite. The next shift had not noticed this and when the drill hit, the powder exploded. Tom Howes had been killed and Prudholme terribly wounded.

"Yes", said Tom Taylor over the wire. "We have Prudholme here and are bringing him down at once." So this was the dawn of 1903. Sad, but work must go on. Two of yesterday missing, but two more would take their place.

Jim Johnston was not a pessimist; he had a sense of intrinsic value, potential and real. Things he did for himself were real. Often work he did for others was potential. One day while working on the camp buildings he said inadvertently, looking over the frame and scaffolding, "something new for the goats to play with." The value of the mine still undetermined, the goats for years have watched the building fall to decay and ruin. We were waiting; for the present all that could be done was done. The stream of life would flow on; soon today and the people of today forgotten.

"I wish some of you superstitious ones could have been with me last night," Jim said, looking straight at me. I said nothing, but remembered a little argument we had had. In the middle of the basin, just before we reached the mine, a cold wind swept over us. We stopped and looked up where the almost perpendicular wall of the mountain arose from the snow to the skyline. In this the tunnel had been driven. Out of the sky fell a star, but instead of shooting out of vision, over the horizon as they always do, it fell, passed between us and the mountain and disappeared at the portal of one of the tunnels -

the tunnel where the accident had occurred. Jim looked thoughtful but never again mentioned the incident to me. A spirit had gone.

A star had fallen.

Prudholme had been blinded by the blast; his family had him returned to Quebec.

Tom was buried in Windermere Cemetery and a blue marble marker, set in cement with bits of ore from the mine, bears this inscription -

**IN MEMORY OF  
THOMAS M. HOWES  
Age 23 years  
KILLED AT PTARMIGAN MINES  
December 31st, 1902  
ERECTED BY HIS FRIENDS**

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**A Tribute to Dr. Robert Elliott**  
*(Charles D. Ellis 1943)*

The passing of Dr. Robert Elliott at Parksville on the 9th of December closed a page of Windermere District early history. He was the first resident physician. The little medical care needed up to his arrival was given by Rev. Father Coccola O.M.I. of St. Eugene Mission.

In the Autumn of 1899, a passenger on the S.S. Duchess, Dr. Robert Elliott landed at Windermere, then the only settlement in the district. He was fresh from the Western University of London Ontario. He took up residence in the new part of the Windermere Hotel, just completed. Dr. Elliott was young, in his 20th year. Tall, with a small black mustache and dressed in sombre black of the professional man of those days, he looked as he proba-

bly hoped to . More than his age.

The town of Athalmer was the Salmon Beds and a Government bridge was under way to replace the boats used to cross the Columbia River. The recent discovery of the Paradise Mine and the Red Line ( Ptarmigan ) had brought in many prospectors and mining men. At Jim Stoddart's cattle corral H.E. Neave started a mining camp, first called Peterborough and later Wilmer. This location being nearer the mines, a toad-stool sprang up and to it's credit never became a "mushroom" town. Dr. Elliott located here the following spring and remained until he moved to Corbin years later. While in Peterborough he married the first school teacher, Miss Ford.

He came at the end of a period; the last of the horse and buggy doctors and the beginning of the automotive age. He also saw the last of the pioneer cowboys, prospectors and transient miners. Rough men, ready men , men of hope and vision challenging a wilderness in hope of fortune.

Dr. Elliott's bedside manner was the manner of the times; he did not pussy-foot in, he was assurance personified. His patient, unless suffering from an accident, having nothing worse than a hangover, was given a dose from the doctor that would cure an army of mules of colic and would see the man soon in the saddle and on the trail to the mountains.

Dr. Robert Elliott. The few remaining early old timers will remember him with respect and as a pioneer to whom posterity owes much.

*( Jaryl McIsaac Files )*

### **School Days in Invermere - 1913**

The Arthur Joseph and Emily Jane Walker Family arrived in Invermere from Lincolnshire, England in May 1913. There were five children, Jack 15 years, Margaret 13, Tom 10 and the twins Kitty and George 8 years. The sixth member, Elizabeth ( Beth), arrived in Aug. 1913, born in Wilmer. That fall they started school in Invermere. Margaret had had her schooling in England. In order to have enough pupils ( 8) to get a teacher to start a school in Invermere, Margaret registered too. After the school got started she dropped out. Kitty was the only girl after Margaret left and she

was such a tom-boy it alarmed her Mother who threatened to take her out of school. The Frater girls from Wilmer arrived in Invermere School just in time to save Kitty from being taken out. They became great chums. George never took kindly to school. He was always in the bad books, so after an altercation with a man teacher, he jumped through a window at age 14 years, and never returned to school. Tom finished his schooling here and got his first job in the Bank of Commerce in Invermere as a teller. He lived upstairs above the bank with a shot-gun beside him. He went on to be a bank manager and then bank inspector travelling across Canada.

In those early school days they walked or rode horseback 3 miles to school. The weather in winter was very much colder then than now. The school house was drafty with a pot-belly wood stove in the centre. The children huddled around it, scorching their faces and freezing their backsides. Also, every morning the ink in the ink wells was frozen. In 1919 the school celebrated with a parade, 50 years of Confederation of Canada.

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### **WINDERMERE DISTRICT CEMETERY**

R.L.T. Galbraith, owner of the townsite of Windermere, donated 5 1/2 acres on Windermere Point to be used as a cemetery for the people of the Valley. The first burials took place in 1886 when a double tragedy occurred. James Mahon Rogers was killed when a wagon load of lumber fell on him. Robert Thornbury was digging the grave and on his way home afterward, was thrown from his horse and suffered a broken neck. A double funeral was held. The cemetery was managed from the Townsite Office.

August 23, 1911, J.T. Laidlaw, a surveyor authorized by the Provincial Government made a survey of the Windermere Townsite. On the map he prepared he shows the boundary fence of the cemetery containing 4.39 acres. 1.78 acres were designated for Protestant burials; 1.04 Roman Catholic and 1.57 for others. The area marked 'other' is now known as the Legion area. The map is in the Museum .

In 1924, the Windermere District Cemetery Co.

was formed to maintain the cemetery. Shares were sold at \$10.00 each and this entitled the shareholder to a plot in the cemetery. The Windermere Orchards Co. who had purchased the Windermere Townsite from Galbraith, had control of the cemetery property. It appears that either in 1919 or 1923, when both Mr. W.H. Cleland and Mr. W. Weir were substantial shareholders in the Windermere Orchards Co. and the Invermere Contracting Co. Ltd, the management of the cemetery was transferred to the Invermere Contracting Co. The Windermere District Cemetery property was then owned by the Invermere Contracting Co. The company also stocked coffins and at the time of a funeral, supplied a truck for a hearse and transportation for the mourners when necessary.

In 1971, the Invermere Garage closed and the building was sold. The cemetery property was transferred to the Corporation of the Village of Invermere. The agreement was signed at 10:00 AM, April 24, 1972.

1980-81, the Windermere District Historical Society became interested in restoring the cemetery as a historical point of interest in the Valley. A Cemetery Restoration Committee was formed. Margaret Christensen, Phyllis Falconer, Jessie Lockhart, and Winnifred Weir were members of the committee which had the cemetery officially declared an historical site on December 14, 1984 under the Heritage Conservation Act. This was accomplished by the support and help of Jim Chabot, MLA. The committee was greatly assisted by H.E. Richardson, an old-timer of Windermere then living in Victoria. He spent much time lobbying the various divisions of the government.

*(Research done by- Jessie Lockhart)*

## **IT STARTED WITH A WOODEN CABOOSE**

( submitted )

On May 17th, a group of society members revisited the unusual home of Dennis and Pat Bonham to see the result of additional acquisitions since our last visit to their residence. The original collection consisted of four rail cars standing on a spur track at Goldie Creek, 5 km south of Invermere. The property, over the years, has seen the addition of several railway buildings, purchased

from CP Rail, all of which enhance and expand their live-in museum.

All of the buildings added were part of the history of the BCR. At least two of the buildings are believed to be over one hundred years old. One dates back to 1897. The unique collection started as an amorphous idea that soon developed a life of its own in Calgary, where the Bonhams resided. The original intention was to obtain a surplus wooden caboose and transform it into a cottage retreat to be parked somewhere in the East Kootenays.

The first of 4 rail cars was bought in 1973 and was ready for moving by 1976. During the intervening years, opportunities allowed for the purchasing of other surplus rolling stock which included a very rare 1903 car that was later traded for a 1971 steel caboose. ( This traded car is now in the possession of Calgary's Heritage Park, the only one left of 200 built. )

Finding a place for the expanded collection in 1976 proved to be quite daunting and required the assistance of rail officials out of Nelson, Cranbrook and Vancouver regions. The site selection process included Columbia Lake as well, but Goldie Creek was the final destination.

Goldie Creek siding has been a marvelous site for the venture as it was the widest part of the railway between Golden and Coal Valley, which allowed for the purchase of the land. A private railway crossing completes the picture to allow access to the lake.

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## **Museum Happenings**

**In July the Broadfoot Families had a reunion. They made a generous donation to the Museum. The money will go towards permanent signage for the outside displays. Thank-you.**

**On July 20th a very successful quilt show was held at the Museum by the Valley Piece-makers Quilt Guild. The raffled quilt was won by Margaret Atkins from Calgary. \$875.00 was donated to the Museum from the raffle.**

**Thank-you.**

*( Compiled by—Sandy McKay )*