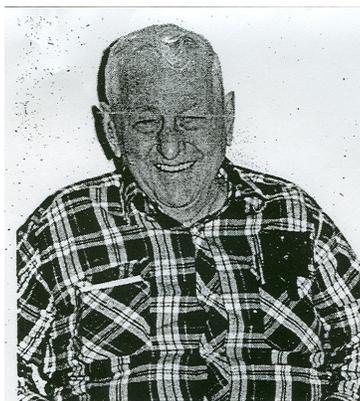


**VALLEY HISTORY**  
**AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM**  
**BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A 1K0    342-9769 MAY 2008**



**Neil Gainey**

Neil Gainey of Athalmer celebrated his 91st birthday in February 1981.

Neil came to the Valley in 1911 for a river drive on Toby Creek. Logs were floated down Toby Creek and Horsethief Creek and then down the Columbia River to Golden. The last river drive on Toby Creek took place in 1912.

Neil at that time followed all the river drives. We commented that river driving must be quite dangerous and required a great deal of skill. "Well" he laughed, "we had a saying that to be a river driver it helped to be half cat and all wild."

Neil took time out for a stint in the U.S. Army during the first World War but he came back to Canada in 1920. In 1928 he went to work for the CPR at Canal Flats. In 1931 the CPR closed their big mill at Canal Flats and opened six small mills up Findley Creek and in 1933 opened three mills up in the Kootenay Valley and Neil worked as river foreman both at Findley and the Kootenay mills.

In the Kootenay they cut timber up as far

as Bear Creek. They logged and then got the logs down to the river by flumes and chutes and then by river drive down to the mill pond at Canal Flats. The remains of the old flumes and chutes can still be seen in places along the steep banks of the Kootenay River in the Kootenay Valley.

Neil has done a lot of things..... Harvesting, threshing, lumbering. "I started working in my early teens," he said, "and I learned to turn my hand to any job. You had to, the only welfare in those days was when they would give you 30 days in jail for vagrancy and I never fancied that," he chuckled.

"I worked all through the Depression at something or other," he said. In 1937 he came to Athalmer to work at Ronachers Mill as a scaler, time keeper and first aid man. He worked there for 21 years. Following that he worked six years for Baltic Sawmills.

Neil can tell many stories about the old days in the Valley. We were talking about energy conservation and he reminisced about Old Joe McLaughlin. "Why, he was an energy conservationist before anybody ever heard the word, way back in the 30's. Old Joe had a Model A truck and he fired it with charcoal gas. It was a comical looking thing with a big 20 gallon drum on the flat deck and on the bull board. It looked like a Rube Goldberg cartoon but it ran on sawdust. Old Joe never bought a gallon of gas. Joe had a sawmill he worked all by himself. He would cut boards and take them to Banff and sell them. On the way he didn't need gas he would just knock some bark off the trees along the way and convert it to energy to run his Model A."

“ We should resurrect the ghost of Old Joe McLaughlin today,” laughed Neil. “There is plenty of old wood, bark and sawdust just left in the bush breeding worms and bugs that kill the healthy trees. We would do well to convert it to energy. And it can be done! Old Joe McLaughlin proved it in the thirties.

( Winn Weir Files )

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### **ARMSTRONG CREEK**

Armstrong Creek flows into Columbia Lake from the East at a point about 15 miles south of Windermere. It is named after Captain F.P. Armstrong and he had a ranch at this point. In 1886 he built and ran the first steamboat, the “ Duchess”, on the Upper Columbia River. He was for many years a skipper navigating the Columbia Lakes and River and the Kootenay River from Golden B.C. to Jennings Montana. He made the first trip through the canal at Canal Flat in the S.S. Gwendoline in 1893. She was built at Golden and was 77 feet over all with an 18 foot beam. She was made longer at Canal Flat in 1894 and then ran from Jennings , Montana to the North Star Mine 55 miles North of Fort Steele, B.C. and was finally wrecked in 1897.

Early in January 1917 Captain Armstrong raised and took with him to the Front, a contingent of British Columbia navigation men being given the rank of ‘First Lieutenant’. For a time they carried on operations on the River Tigris.

Armstrong Creek flows into Armstrong Bay on Columbia Lake.

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**September 1912-** The Duke of Sutherland came in From Calgary Sunday and had afternoon tea at the Invermere Hotel, afterwards going on to Wilmer with Mr. Bruce, whose guest he has been during his stay here.

### **Golden Times- November 1912**

Miss Dorothy Davies, who is being sent out by the Equal Franchise League of Victoria to organize the women of the province for forming branches , expects to be in Invermere by the end of the week. Mrs. Starke has kindly offered the use of the ladies’ parlor in the Hotel for an afternoon meeting.

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### **Irrigation on the Benches**

( By Helen Annis- May 3, 1994 )

The irrigation system was built in 1912-1913 by a company known as the Columbia Valley Irrigation Fruit Lands Ltd. ( CVI). It carried water from Boulder Creek ( a tributary of Horsetheif Creek) through miles and miles of ditches, and wherever there was low lying land it had to be carried in flumes ( wooden boxes supported on trestles ) to maintain the gravity.

This system carried water for domestic and irrigation purposes to all the area now known as the Toby Benches, but at that time it was occupied by the CBI, who sold it to settlers in 20 acre parcels for the purpose of growing fruit. It was soon found to be unpractical for that purpose due to the society of the climate, and the settlers then turned to mixed farming, milk cows, sheep, pigs, poultry, and vegetables to make their living.

The first water was delivered in the fall of 1913 and the ranchers were required to install their own cisterns, or reservoirs, to hold a sufficient supply of domestic water for the winter months. The System had to be shut down from October 1st to May 1st on account of freezing.

For this service the residents were charged at the rate of \$3.00 per acre per month for all land that was irrigated and a charge of \$1.00 per acre per month for all land owned but not irrigated. This later charge was to be used as a fund for maintenance of the system.

This system worked alright for a number of years until the wooden flumes got old and started to fall apart and then it was found the maintenance fund was not adequate to repair them. The Company ( CVI ) decided to abandon the system and they returned the remainder of their land ( unsold ) to the government.

During the years of operation a man known as a “ Ditch Walker ” was employed to patrol the ditches and remove any blockages etc. before they could dam up the water and cause a break in the ditch walls. Where the water had to be diverted into two or more branches it was controlled by a ‘ water gate ’, a sliding panel which controlled the flow. Some are still to be found in various places though of course are not usable. Most of the flumes in the main line were approximately 2ft. high and 3ft wide ,though small branch lines were much smaller. Some were short, maybe only 50 ft. long if it was a narrow depression to span . Some were very long where it was a wide area of low lying land. Some were high, the highest being known as ‘ the 7.5 ft. high flume ’ which spans quite a deep ravine. In 1941 this flume collapsed completely and could not longer carry any water. The CVI said they had no funds to repair it but a government grant was obtained to provide materials to rebuild it. This was done with volunteer labor provided by the remaining residents and that is the structure that is there today. A few years after it was built, more of flumes above it fell apart so it was only used for a short time.

When the system was built there were no bulldozers or back hoes. All the work was done by men with picks and shovels and a slip- scrape... ( a shovel pulled by horses. ) It was hard work and could never be accomplished on today's wages. Unfortunately, when the system failed , it took the hopes and dreams of many people.

## **The Columbian- Wilmer, B.C.**

August 8, 1911

Captain Blakely of the Steamer Selkirk, is having his hands full these days in hauling freight. The Captain and his estimable lady are extremely popular and tourists have nothing but words of praise for the unfailing courtesy received at their hands while passengers on the Selkirk.

## **Museum Files- January 1930**

The epoch making flight of Messrs. Rutledge and Payne from Calgary to Vancouver in an airplane in a bee line crossing this district about Radium Hot Springs has been watched with great interest. Last week Captain John S. Blakley surprised and pleased the local residents by his flight from his airdrome to this part and after circling about the centers made several landings upon Lake Windermere before he returned home, plainly demonstrating how simple it is for an experienced man to make landings in this neighbourhood either in summer or in winter.

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## **First Jet Plane Flies Over Valley 1953**

First Comet jet transport in service with the R.C.A.F. passed over the Windermere District Wednesday ( June 10 ) en route to Vancouver from Calgary. It was on a Canada wide familiarization flight. It is based with Air Transport Command at Dorval, Montreal.

The big aircraft had a double crew of 11. From the Windermere District the Comet jet was faintly visible to watching residents but the sound of its powerful engines was clearly heard. Few people realized that the first jet plane to pass over the valley was overhead.

## **Windermere Schools**

1894– The first school was held in one of Rufus Kimpton’s log buildings. Mary Kay Smith was the first teacher. Pupils were: the Morigeaus – Frank, Ed, Martin, Louise, Rose and Marcelline, Hope Brewer, Jack and Daisy Tegart, Louis Kie ( Coy ). Hope Brewer walked from Fairmont to attend school.

An earlier class had been held in the NWMP ( Government) building but the school was not sanctioned and soon shut down.

1896– Miss Evelyn Howard-Gibbon, teacher. Pupils: Gladys Pitts, Lloyd Tegart, Vaughan Kimpton, Clifford Kimpton, Greta Pitts, Ashton Powers, Dorothy Pitts, Hope Brewer, Dominic Nicholas, Brett and Hardwick Grainger.

1898– Annie Tegart teacher.

The first one-room school was built next to the Presbyterian church and was in use until 1948 when the original room of the present school was built.

According to the late Vaughan Kimpton, when the riverboats came and blew their whistle, the school would empty and the students would run down to the lake to await its arrival.

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### **Golden Star– April 6, 1928**

“No fewer than 73 acres of seed peas are to be grown in the Windermere District this year for the Broder Canning Co. of New Westminster, B.C. The partial list of growers is : Dr. W.H. Gaddes, Edgewater; J. Maurer, Simon Ronacher, Robert Tegart, Windermere; Joseph Lake, James Duncan, H.C.Rayson, Wilmer and Jos. W. Bellamy, Canal Flat.”

# **JARYL**

**DEDICATED / POSITIVE**

**ARCHIVIST/ HERITAGE CONVEN-  
ER/**

**HISTORIAN**

**ORGANIZER /PROMOTER**

**COMMITTED**

**ALL OF THE ABOVE MAKES US THINK  
OF JARYL.**

**JARYL WAS ONE OF A KIND.**

**READY TO PLEASE  
WILLING TO HELP  
GREATLY MOTIVATED  
SINCERELY INTERESTED.**

**WHEN JARYL TOOK ON A PROJECT,  
YOU KNEW IT WOULD BE WELL DONE**

**THE MUSEUM WAS VERY  
FORTUNATE THAT IT BECAME ONE  
OF JARYL’S PROJECTS**

**JARYL McISAAC  
Nov.22, 1944- FEB.19, 2008**

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Thank you to the Members that so generously donated towards the “Jaryl McIsaac Memorial Fund”. It will help us to carry on Jaryl’s great work.

( compiled by– Sandy McKay )