

VALLEY HISTORY
AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM
BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 250-342-9769 August 2012



FRITZ AND ROSE TRACHSEL
1921

Rose Trachsel was born February 26, 1900 in Meggen, Switzerland and immigrated to Canada and Windermere along with her husband Fritz, and five children, in 1937. She says, “ I didn’t want to leave Switzerland, but my husband had been to Canada two years earlier and he felt we could make a good home here. He picked this valley because he thought the mountains would make us less homesick.” Four other Swiss families made the trip with them: the Wengers, two Stoller families and the Ryters.

She remembered her first days in the valley. The family stayed first in a boxcar at Athalmer, but it was very cold, and they moved to one of the cabins at Coldstream Auto camp. That was also very cold and it was soon after that they purchased the home in Windermere from Teddy and Olive Ede.

There they went into the mixed farming

business with all the children, Rose, Helen, Alfred, Margaret and John helping with the chores. They cultivated a large vegetable garden, raised pigs, chickens and turkeys and had numerous milk cows which supplied many residents of Windermere with fresh milk.

From these beginnings at Windermere, Mr. Trachsel increased his farming holdings, at the Hammond Ranch (now Fritz and Shirley Maurers) at Windermere, and also went into the logging and Christmas tree business. One of his largest holdings was Block 17 on Horse Thief Creek.

Mrs. Trachsel remembers that the entire family, including herself, harvested the Christmas trees, with all the skidding done manually. She laughs when she talks about wearing mens trousers because her dresses got torn if she wore them while skidding and yarding trees.

As the family grew up and moved away from home, she says she and her husband gradually reduced their work load and retired to their home in Windermere.

But one thing never changed. The door to Rose’s home was always open and hospitality and friendship was always there for anyone in need of it. Many people arriving in the district for the first time found their way to her house and many spent their first months in this country at the Trachsel home.

She is known through the whole of the Valley as “Granny Trachsel.” Once a letter addressed just to Granny Trachsel, Windermere, was delivered to her. It was the only address needed. The Trachsels boarded people for thirty-five years, with up to six

boarders at one time. Many people remember good times around the table and out in the porch. It was a home away from home for many people.

Fritz Trachsel was born in Frutigan, Switzerland on March 10, 1895. Married to Rose in 1921 and they lived in Frutigan and Luzern before immigrating to Canada in 1937.

“Fritz Trachsel is a ruddy-faced, gleeful little gnome of a man who lives in the heart of the Windermere Valley in British Columbia. Everywhere he goes he radiates a bucolic charm and wit that makes people smile and laugh and feel gay.

I strolled down the main street in Calgary with him the other day and it seemed that half the people on the street knew him by his first name.

“They all know me,” said Fritz, “but I can’t remember all their names.” But whether he knows a person’s name or not, he’ll stop for a chat, a jest or an exchange of witticisms. The laughter and smiles that follow are infectious.

Hundreds of people in Calgary know Fritz from the days when he was the Christmas tree King here. He brought his first truckload of evergreens to Calgary in 1938. There was no heavy haul road from Invermere to Banff in those days and he hauled them the long route through Cranbrook and the Crow’s Nest Pass. They were some left over from a contract with J. Hofert Ltd., a Christmas tree wholesaling company in Washington State. However, over the intervening years his tree sales in Calgary rose to a peak of 15 truckloads.

I think many youngsters used to believe the rotund woodsman was one of Santa’s helpers because he always appeared before Christmas with the tree.

In the last two years Fritz Trachsel hasn’t shown up with his usual consignment of trees. He was imprisoned (and for this tough wiry outdoorsman, that’s the right word) in

hospital. Last winter it was with a broken shoulder blade and collar-bone; the year before a broken back. The year before that he received a bunch of broken ribs working in the bush but he was able to brush off any suggestion that he stay away from his beloved Christmas tree permit high on the mountain above Radium Junction. Over the objection of his wife and friends, he says he’s going to be back in the woods this winter. At 69 he says he’s too young to sit idle when there are trees to be cut.

Six weeks before Christmas he was working on his permit. So intent was he on the job that he fell over a 150 foot cliff. After awhile, he picked himself up and started limping towards town. He came upon the local telephone lineman who could see there was something wrong but couldn’t get Fritz to admit it.

“Take me to the hotel for a beer.” Fritz gritted.

In the hotel, one of his friends saw him and said, “Fritz, what happened?” But Fritz remained tight-lipped and gratefully accepted a ride home.

Three days later he was back working in the bush. Later he noticed his arm and chest turning black. One of his men made a hasty run with him to the doctor in Invermere. The doctor took one look, gave him a shot of pain killer, got him into an operating room and found a broken shoulder blade and collar-bone. They let him out of the hospital three days before Christmas.

For Fritz Trachsel, life just wouldn’t be life if he couldn’t live in the mountains. Mountains were the prime force of his boyhood years in his native Frutigen, Berner-Oberland, Switzerland. His father was a slate miner and like most other people of the area, he owned a small mountain-bound farm. It was here Fritz played and worked during his youth.

“I think the reason I never got to be very tall is because I had to pack so much salt up

the mountain to those goats,” he said, and burst into uproarious laughter. It wasn’t all work. He and his brothers and sisters learned to ski on polished barrel staves. Fritz can cut a mean slalom down the slopes of the Panorama Ski Hill back of Invermere.

With the school over he went to work in a hotel operated by some of his father’s relatives as an apprentice cook and gardener. After three years of this he went to the grill in the Kaiserhof Hotel in Berlin to advance further as a cook.

“And so you graduated as a chef,” I observed.

“Ach, no, I was never a chef. I was a cook,” he said. “ It takes 20 years to become a chef.”

At the time Trachsel was there the Kaiserhof was one of the biggest hotels in the world and certainly boasted one of the best dining room's. Its kitchen staff of 127 was the cream of the crop of Europe.

He left the Kaiserhof in Berlin in a hurry in 1917. From there to the ownership of a small dairy farm at Windermere, B.C. in 1937. ” Johann Friedrich Trachsel (Fritz) died April 25,1969.

(written by John Schmidt)
(from Doreen Persson Files)

LAKE WINDERMERE WEEK-1922
Wednesday , August 30

Afternoon– Opening of the Hudson's Bay Fort erected in honor of David Thompson.

Indian Pageant

Reception at Fort

Indian and French Canadian dances

Thursday, August 31

Golf and tennis tournaments

Aquatic Sports

Grand Ball in Fort

Friday, September 1st

Windermere District Fall Fair

Saturday, September 2nd

Baseball—Indians vs. Whites.

From the Files of B.G. Hamilton 1920

In regard to my visit on the 31st December 1919 to the old diggings of Wild Horse Creek, B.C., I left the home of Mr. R.L.T. Galbraith the Indian Agent one mile out of Fort Steele at 2:20 p.m. and walked for some distance north east to beyond Fisher Creek. A total I made it of five and half miles. There were no signs of living beings about the diggings at that time except some smoke which was coming from an outside smoke pipe in the first log cabin that I came to . This I understood to be from a fire looked over by an old Chinaman named How Witch. He , along with another old Chinaman are the reputed sole occupants of the diggings. The name of the other old boy is Lee Jack. Him I met on the road on my walk to the diggings. He is very old and feeble. He told me in his quaint way that he was going to Fort Steele to have a smoke, further mentioning the word opium and showing a set of well browned teeth.

Mr. Galbraith has taken a great interest in these two men. They have been in that neighborhood since the very early days. Mr. Galbraith , having come into that part himself in 1870, has recited how that many years ago, for I was past the scene of the event in 1898 and it was an old tale then, how that How Witch , having made a good pot of gold was on his way back to China, another man was with him. How Witch had , through hard work and industry accumulated what would be enough to keep him comfortably for the remainder of his life in his native land. They were driving comfortably along on the stage going North some distance past Wolf Creek, Jim Rogers was handling the reins when a masked man arose from behind a log on the west side of the road and held them up relieving the two Chinamen of their poke which amounted to some \$5000.00. Without any money left, How Witch faced about and went back up

to Wild Horse where he has since been eking out an existence with pan washing of gold. And there he will remain and dream of the time his life's earnings were taken from him. Mr. Galbraith says that in his opinion that there is no doubt but that a deliberate plan was made to rob the old man, word being sent out to confederates. The robbers are supposed to have come from the United States. No convictions were ever made.

Years after , while Jim Rogers was freighting from Fort Steele north for Mr. Galbraith, and while in the lonely part near Mud Creek, he experienced some trouble with the reach of his wagon. He apparently got down to fix it and while underneath, the wagon started and with it's load ran over him and killed him on the spot.

(B.G. Hamilton Files)

The Ward Ranch

The Ward Ranch is situated east of the Upper Ranch, against the Rocky Mountains.

In the early 1900's, Captain and Mrs. Ward settled on this piece of property. They came from England with one son and built a log house, a barn and one other out building. They got their water from a spring that has since dried up. They returned to England in the 1920's.

Dorothy Brown (nee Smith) remembers going to the Ward Ranch by horse and buggy for Sunday School Picnics. There were the Smiths, Hansens and Thompsons. The Hansens lived in Edgewater and the Thompsons lived across the river. Mrs. Thompson always brought her famous bacon and egg pie cooked in two shells.

The buildings remained on the property until the 1960's.

Al Gissing built his own cabin on the property just north of the Ward buildings. He lived there during the 1940's and 50's . He would walk over the hill to the Tegart Ranch for a visit and he often stayed for dinner. Carl Knudel lived in the Ward building

during the 1940's. He would walk down the horse trail to visit the Bokers at the Upper Ranch.

Kirks purchased the property in 1946 for Christmas tree harvest. There is some evidence of some plantation planning.

In 1998 the Schickendanz Group, calling themselves Radium Ranches, purchased the property.

The Kirkland Preservation Group and the Elk Foundation have been very concerned about the unique eco-system that exists in this area. They are promoting the need for Wildlife corridors.

The property has been logged and it has been used for grazing cattle.

(Museum Files)

In the Archives

The museum has been busy with visitors who bring with them connections with big names and others who just have the tiniest of impressions. The summer started with a visit from Gordon Lake - wonderful, please come again Gordon. Then others followed: Tricia Flint, direct descendent of David Thompson; Helen Perry, grand daughter of the owner of the Selkirk steamboat; Doyle Cave descendent of Francois Baptiste Morigeau. George McLean from Edgewater, still harvests with his trusty team of horses; and John Bavin snuck in to look at and update some of our photos. The smallest visitors we've had is the bats, that's another story. Just this month, so far, we have had Donald Mackay who is related to homesteader Colin Mackay. We continue to receive donations but a big name this month is Paul Dean, local boy and lead guitar player of Loverboy. Some family brought in some memorabilia from the early years . I wish to thank everyone who comes to visit and donate because with out you we don't have a museum, we have just a bunch of buildings with a whole lot of stuff in them.

JD Jeffery

(compiled by Sandy McKay)