

VALLEY HISTORY

AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 250-342-9769 February 2013



Godfrey and Nellie Vigne

Godfrey Vigne immigrated to Canada from London, England to Wynndel, B.C. in 1908. In 1909 he left Wynndel, jumping a freight train as far as Cranbrook, B.C. which was the starting point of his trek to Invermere, B.C. He and his companion walked the ninety miles to Invermere. Through the years Godfrey relayed stories of his sojourn but as it is with family folklore the stories fade from memories He told of Fort Steele being more active during the night hours than during the day, of a stop at Island Pond and having enjoyed his tea at the Fairmont Road House.

As a journeyman mechanic from the C.R. Rolls Co. in England (later named Rolls Royce) Godfrey was employed by the Invermere contracting Co. as mechanic at the Cleland Garage.

As well as being the mechanic, he drove the Stage, a 'White' automobile. Godfrey would pick up passengers from the train in Golden and drive them to points between Golden and Cranbrook. Many of his passengers were Remittance men from Britain.

This would be between the years of 1909-1914.

1914 War was declared and Godfrey, with other men of Invermere enlisted in the army .

Godfrey was posted to England and on to France where he was wounded and repatriated to England hospital called " The Granville" at Ramsgate, England. It was at the hospital that he met Nellie Sutton. Nellie, a soprano singer, sang for the wounded soldiers at the hospital. Godfrey courted Nellie and they were married and had a son Godfrey Jr.

After the war Godfrey returned to Invermere in 1918 and Nellie and son followed in 1919.

His family needed a home and Godfrey bought a house from Wing Lee in Athalmer. The receipt of the sale reads " House in bush. (Daisy's house) for the sum of \$500.00". The house was moved from Athalmer to Invermere using a team of eight draft horses at the cost of another \$500.00. It was renovated and became the Vigne family home. Taxes were \$5.25. Later the house became the property of Winnifred Weir.

In 1920 a son, Lancelot Howard St. Barb was born to Nellie and Godfrey. Thanks to Rufus Kimpton his name was shortened to Bill. In 1922 Robert Henry was born in Invermere. Robert's Godfather was A.E. Fisher. Both boys were delivered by Dr. Coy.

The Vigne family remained in Invermere until 1926 when they moved to Vulcan, Alberta and on to Creston, B.C. where they resided the rest of their lives.

Godfrey and Nellie had two daughters born in Creston. Phyllis Evelyn and Shirley Ann. On frequent visits to Invermere Godfrey and Nellie continued friendships with Gladys Pitts, A.E. Fisher, Gilbert Cartwright, the Blakelys, Tunnacliffes, Tegarts, Nixons, and Fraters. With affection word would spread that the "Bloke" was in town.

Godfrey Vigne Sr.'s contribution to his adopted country, Canada, was exemplary and justly acknowledged by the many honors and awards he received during his life time. He joined the Masonic Lodge in Invermere prior to WW1 also the Gizen Shrine Club. He lost his regalia during the war and it was found by a brother Mason and returned sometime after the war. Godfrey was Past Master of Invermere Lodge.

Godfrey Jr. and Bob took their father back to Invermere in the early 1960's for the occasion of his 50th anniversary of his association of the Masonic Lodge. During WW 1 he was given a life membership in the Barstow Lodge in England.

In 1919 an English War Bride of the First World War Nellie Marian Vigne and her baby son Godfrey crossed the Atlantic by ship arriving in Quebec, Canada and onward by train to Golden and into the arms of her husband Godfrey Sr. The end of a long journey and to her final destination and her home for the next seven years was Invermere, B.C. As a young woman she was a person of determination and defiant of the times when women had little or no rights. Nellie joined the work force and became a department manager of "Bobby's"- a prestigious ladies wear store in Ramsgate, England.

Along with all the people of the British Isles, she suffered the horrors of war. Nellie lived with her parents Lousia and Henry Sutton and their house was bombed more than once. Because of the close vicinity to the Port of Dover the allied soldiers wounded in France were transported to Ramsgate and to the Old Granville Hotel that had been renovated into

a military hospital.

Nellie was an accomplished singer and volunteered to entertain the wounded soldiers. It was at the hospital she met and fell in love with Godfrey Vigne who had been wounded in a battle in France. When Godfrey's wounds were healed he became an ambulance driver at the Granville. They courted and were married December 14, 1916.

After the Sutton home was bombed, if it was possible, during the bombings Godfrey would take Nellie and her family to the basement of the Granville. With the declaration of peace November 11th, 1918 Godfrey was repatriated to Canada and Nellie was to follow, crossing the Atlantic with other war brides. Nellie often told the story, during the crossing her engagement ring became entangled in baby Godfrey's shawl and how broken hearted she was having lost her precious ring.

In 1965 Ethel Vigne taped Nellie reminiscing her first days in Invermere in 1919. With little prompting Nellie relayed some of her "Tales of the Invermere".

"What a difference there is today. When I came to Invermere there was the Experimental Farm, Invermere Contracting company, (Godfrey worked at the garage), the hotel, post office and Fisher's store. There was only the one street. There was Fort Thompson of course, and the hospital, which was a funny little place not bigger than a house. The hospital was moved down to Robert Randolph Bruce's place. Bruce was the Ambassador to Tibet.

I must tell you about the Powwow. The Indians came from all over the country. Even the millionaire tribes from the United States. Tipi's popped up in a circle and surrounded our house which was up on a knoll. There were tipi's all over the town. Everyone attended the Powwow and it was held at the Fort. There were horse races, Indians performing the Rain Dance and the Sun Dance. There was singing and games.

Unsuccessfully, the people of Invermere tried to outlaw the Indian drumming because the drums sent the Indians into a frenzy and they were afraid the drummers from the different tribes may cause bedlam. There was only one Powwow while I lived in Invermere but it is a cherished memory.” Nellie Marion Vigne was a great pioneer and her contributions to her new country Canada, included being a chartered member of the Royal Canadian Legion Ladies Auxiliary Branch 29, president and secretary treasurer for years and member of Provincial Command. She was an active member of the Eastern Star. Gave freely of her time to local charities and if in her time, Citizen of the Year had been in vogue, she would be the top contender. Nellie was a great lady.

(By Robert Henry Vigne)
(Museum Files)

News clips form the Past

1946— Indian agent, James S. Dunn has been moved to New Westminster. Mr. and Mrs. Dunn lived in Invermere for many years. Mr. Dunn was manager of the Windermere district Creamery during the last years of its existence. He and Mrs. Dunn operated the Invermere Hotel for some time. In 1946 he was appointed Indian Agent and resided in Cranbrook.

1959— Frank Richardson, postmaster of Athalmer, retired after 49 years. He came to the Windermere Valley in 1907 from Liverpool. He succeeded Joseph Lake as postmaster. Mr. Richardson first worked for the Columbia River Lumber Co. and ran the post office in their office. In 1911, he built his own grocery store and moved the postal service there. When he went overseas in WW1, John Dilworth was acting postmaster. Mr. Richardson is succeeded by Mrs. Frank Dreier.

“ Tough Winter Ahead” , says Charlie Mackey 1962

Some say you can tell how the winter will be
By the number of cones on the trees,
By the thickness of hair on the hides of the beasts,
Or location of nests of the bees.

Old-timers will tell you the winter’s length
By the amount of seed on the rose;
And that it will be either mild or severe
By the way the onion grows.

Last week Charlie Mackey went up to his attic
To bring down some jars to can fruit ;
He found that a squirrel had filled four of them
With pine cones for its winter loot.

Now, the old-timer can tell what he wants about weather,
From nature, or pain in his bones,
But Charlie will tell you the winter looks tough
When the squirrels start pickling cones !

(By Ron Ede) *Museum Files*

April 13, 1912 - Golden Star

“Orchard lots, villa lots and just plain lots in the “New Railway Town site of Invermere”. These were sold through W.J. Thorne, special agent for the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruit Lands Ltd. At Golden.

Believe it or not !! 1961

The old timer was telling this story during the recent cold spell. He was saying it would probably break with a Chinook the like of which we had never seen before.

“ Quite a few years ago we had a cold spell like this, maybe even colder, and it lasted a long time. Bob Tegart, up there on the Alpine ranch was getting pretty short of hay and he decided one 40 below day to go up to Fairmont and get some. He hitched his fastest team to the sleigh and set out. Loaded up his hay, and one of the old Indians told him there was a strong Chinook on the way. Bob set out for home and was near the Crooked Tree when the Chinook hit. Well, sir, that was a warm Chinook. Bob lashed his team to their fastest and managed to keep just ahead of the Chinook. That sleigh and load of hay managed to keep running on frozen snow, but as Bob looked over his shoulder, not ten feet away the ground was bare and the water was running from the melted snow. ”

General and Mrs. Poett

General and Mrs. Poett were also very early settlers. They were English but lived in Germany before coming out. To Canada . They took Neave’s (Martin’s place later) place west of Lake Lillian and called it “Westlake”. They had five children, mostly grown-up: Phyllis, Evelyn, Babs, and twins, Angela and Nigel. Mrs. Poett was an American and a Roman Catholic. They built a large three story house and gave great parties. From one of these parties, Mr. Norring was returning home to his partner captain Robinson by canoe across Lake Lillian. He was known to be a strong swimmer but his canoe was found next day and the lake dragged for a week before his body was found. Mrs. Poett’s sister was Mrs. Coats (of J & P Coats Cotton) and had land adjoining the Poett’s. It was later all one farm. The road in those days from Inver-

mere went by Wilmer and was just a track for horses and wagons, sleighs in winter. Everyone drove horses or rode them. Poetts went back to England for the 1914-1918 war and never came back. The place sold to the Lairds and later the Kellys. (Now belongs to Jenny and George Richardson 2013) .

(by Phyllis Falconer)
(Museum Files)

Family Trees

Our Heritage Theme for this spring is the development of your family tree. Please think of doing a family tree for your family and bringing it to the museum. All trees will be on display.

Movie Nights at the Museum

**February 17- “ State Fair ”
7:00 P.M. at the Museum**

**March 17- “Snowy River ”
7:00 P.M. at the Museum**

**April 11- “Alive”
7:00 P.M. at D.T.S.S.
6:00 P.M. - guest speakers**

A big thank you to all the members that have renewed their memberships !

(Compiled by Sandy McKay)