

VALLEY HISTORY
AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM
BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A 1K0 250-342-9769 August 2015



Invermere and Beyond
Margaret Ashworth Foreman
April 26, 1945

(as told to Naomi Miller, 2002)

Margaret Ashworth Foreman went through training known to colleagues as “Magee” to differentiate her from half a dozen Margarets at St. Eugene’s Hospital in the mid 1940’s. She had been born in that hospital in Cranbrook before her parents moved to Invermere.

Margaret remembers chafing at the morning routine with prayers and uniform inspection. She especially wished that she did not have to wear a cap (though the cap was a cherished symbol for a large percentage of her peers.) She did agree with the principle of clean white shoes and automatically polished her shoes every night before bedtime. On days when prayers were held in the chapel and Sister Denise would intone, “ Let us pray that the seniors pass their examinations” Magee inwardly sneered, “ If they haven’t studied, prayers are not going to help them ! ”

She did her best to achieve the “full bath and bed change in twenty minutes.” At one point she assisted Sister Domitille with lab work and X-ray . Margaret became so proficient that she was assigned to those duties while Sister went on holidays for a month. When she wished to visit her home in Invermere she had to work two weeks to be allowed two days off, arrange to ride on the freight truck north, and be driven back to Cranbrook by one or both of her parents. Should that be a three day weekend, she was scheduled to work the following two weeks with no day off.

Near the end of her training Sister Denise administered a Montoux test which burst into a violent (plus 4) reaction on Margaret’s forearm. Many of the students had no reaction so were subjected to a second test with a larger dose of OT (Old Tuberculin) but obviously Margaret did not need that second test. She passed her Registered Nurse exams in January 1945 and promptly went to work in the Lady Elizabeth Bruce Memorial Hospital in Invermere. She was 23 years old.

The hospital was a log building . “Pynelogs.” Built for the bride of Robert Randolph Bruce. It was intended to be luxurious and modern by 1914 standards. Specifications, however, exceeded the capabilities of local contractors and Lady Elizabeth died of a ruptured appendix in September 1915 before the home was ready for her to occupy. Robert Randolph Bruce lived there when on business in the Columbia Valley. After his term as Lieutenant-Governor of the province he donated Pynelogs for use as a hospital. He even paid for renovations to turn the mansion into the community hospital and cut the ribbon to open it on Coronation Day in 1937.

This hospital served Invermere until 1957.

Margaret enjoyed the variety of challenges at the Lady Elizabeth Bruce Memorial Hospital. The individual on duty cared for as many as eight patients, did all the cleaning, and frequently had to prepare meals. The loft of Pynelogs was the original Nurses Home. Then the Carriage House was fixed up to become the 'Rez'. (Named for the product the nurses used to finish the floor.) It was commonplace for the nurse to recruit a convalescent patient to peel vegetables or prepare and serve the bedtime cocoa and cookies. If a patient died, the nurse bathed the corpse and prepared it for the undertaker then the nurses carried the deceased out to the Carpenter's shop. Laundry was done twice a week by hand and hung on outdoor clotheslines. When it was very busy, the laundry woman had to come in extra days.

Two doctors, Dr. Tripp and Dr. Ken Williams, (later Dr. Tripp was replaced by Dr. Davies), served a large geographical area which included the Ktunaxa people on the Columbia Lake Reserve to the south and the Kinbaskets on the Shuswap Reserve to the north. Patients from the reserves were very appreciative of the care and services provided by medical personnel. Margaret recalls nursing a five year old Ktunaxa boy with pneumonia. When the lad had recovered she left a message with the Chief (who had the only phone on the reserve.) The mother was out harvesting Christmas trees and finally came to reclaim her little boy five days after the phone notification.

The Christmas tree business needed workers to cut trees after the first frost (usually mid October) up to early December. The part time workers were given no safety training or equipment so there were numerous injuries during the busy season. The workers came in to have cuts sutured. The commonest self-inflicted cut was between the thumb and forefinger. At times each of the doctors would be cleaning up a cut, reconnecting the ligament between digits, while the nurse was caring for ward patients and observing a mother in labour.

Margaret and the other RNs were expected to deliver many babies born in Lady

Bruce Hospital. The doctors supervised them when they were new on staff and laid out their post partum instructions. With telephones few and far between a doctor might or might not be notified instantly. All calls had to go through a local switchboard where the operator went off at 11:00 pm. At night one line was connected between the hospital and the doctor on call. But no outside emergency call could be placed until 7 am the next day.

By October of her graduation year Margaret was diagnosed as having active tuberculosis. She was admitted to Willow Chest Centre in Vancouver for several months then sent home to Invermere to convalesce. Dr. Tripp and Williams decided that Margaret could use her allowed active hours to perform X-ray and lab duties at the hospital. The only time that X-rays could be taken was between noon and one pm. Electricity was denied other citizens for that hour because otherwise the power plant's output was insufficient to run the X-ray.

When Margaret's lungs were considered healed she was advised to seek light duty so she worked at the Jericho Beach DVA Hospital. She did three months in charge of night shift then was ordered to return to Willow Chest Centre as a patient. This time she was treated with pneumothorax and later a phrenic crush. After months of patience as a patient she again returned to Invermere. Again she was recruited to take X-rays at noon hour. She remembers another example of expediting service when the doctors and nurse were busy. A patient with an arm or leg in a cast would be informed that the X-ray showed that the broken bone had mended, then he was handed a cast cutter. Many a logger, miner or Christmas tree harvester removed the plaster cast and went on his way rejoicing.

Miss Ashworth's nursing career resumed when she returned to Vancouver, this time on staff at Willow Chest Centre. A handsome gentleman came into her life in Invermere, then Terrace and Vancouver. After a long courtship they eloped to Blaine, Washington and became Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Foreman.

Ralph's apartment was downtown. Margaret wanted to be able to walk to work so she quickly obtained a position on staff at St. Paul's Hospital. Ralph followed a business lead to California. There Margaret became nurse-anesthetist with an Oral Surgeon. She administered sodium pentothal to ease the patient through painless dentistry. She enjoyed her autonomy and overall good relationship with staff. Things purred along for almost seven years when illness raised its ugly head. She was diagnosed as having a tubercular kidney. Ralph took her back to Vancouver where surgeons at St. Paul's removed the diseased kidney. They returned to Orange County. Ralph died in 1962 but Margaret stayed on until 1981. For years she was Supervisor of 300 bed St. Joseph's Hospital in Orange County. She came back to Victoria to be near her mother. In Victoria she worked in the Oak Bay Kiwanis Pavilion where she and one aide cared for 43 residents. She retired in 1987 at age 65. Unhappily her Mom broke her hip at that exact date so she had to nurse her mother who eventually died at age 102 in 1992. Following her mothers death Margaret returned to Invermere. Her feeling of goodwill to her childhood home continues as she volunteers to drive for Meals on Wheels or to help other Seniors.

Margaret died in Invermere B.C. on September 7, 2011.

(Museum Files)

February 16, 1934

The packers from Butte, Montana have called for another consignment of range cayuses and the riders are busy gathering in as many as possible so as to be able to ship out on next week's Kootenay Central train going south. These are canned for the French market where there is a good demand for this class of canned meat. It brings ready cash to the local people and employment to the younger riders.

March 16, 1934

Cougars have been very plentiful round the district. Particularly in the Sheep Creek mountains near Premier Lake. Martin Morigeau came into Invermere a few days ago to collect his bounty from the Provincial Government for 6 full grown cougars which he had shot up Sheep Creek. He found several carcasses of deer and mountain sheep which they had killed and from which they had been living, and was fortunate to find a den where he captured a very fine young cougar which he is willing to sell to some zoo wishing to replenish their stock. As Morigeau went back to his trap line, he can always be located through the provincial police office at this place.

(Museum Files)

The Mulligan Stew

Snow on the level, three feet deep,
 Oh, Lord! How the wind is blowing;
 We've eaten our caps and suspender straps,
 And damned if it ain't still snowing.

We made a Mulligan stew today
 Of a candle, some soap, and a wisp of hay,
 Some small pine blocks, a pair of socks,
 A wood rats nest and a couple of rocks.

Tomorrow morn at the peep of dawn
 We're going to leave this shack,
 A trail to seek o'er mountain peak
 Adios! If we don't come back.

And in the spring, when all nature sings
 Should you chance on this trail to come
 back.

If you find a couple of skeleton things,
 You'll know it's just me and Jack !

(Conrad Kain found this poem penned to the door of a trappers cabin on one of his climbs.)

W.H.Cleland to R.R.Bruce
July 18,1940

Another contingent of your local boys left on this morning's train for different destinations. There was a large crowd at the station to see them off and the boys were very happy. Many of them you know quite well, so I am attaching a list. There are a few of them that I know would be most delighted by a short note from you when you have the odd moment to spare.

For instance— Charlie Thornton, Jack Nixon and Dave Nixon, Jack Walker, Carl Jones and the three sons of the late Gordon Palmer—Elmer, Lloyd and Howard. Most of these, as you will note on the attached list, have joined your old Battalion at Victoria— the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Scottish. There are many more that plan on leaving shortly, many of them awaiting instructions. Amongst them is Jim Ashworth., who is joining the Royal Air Force.
(Museum Files)

Joan George

Joan has been a member of the Windermere District Historical Society for many years. During the recent years she has been our secretary. She has always been quick to volunteer to help with clean-up bees, with new displays, with refreshments for meetings and any other duties that are needed at the Windermere Valley Museum. Joan, we wish you well at your new home in Victoria.

Movie Night at the Museum

In September the 'Movie Night' starts into its fourth full season, hopefully with the new museum projector in place. Following are the selections planned for this fall.

They start at 7:00 pm on their respective Sunday evenings.

The first one is a musical.

Sept. 20 - The Student Prince-1954

Starring Ann Blyth and Edmund Purdom
(with the singing voice of Mario Lanza)
Set in 1900 Heidelberg, Germany .

Oct. 18- River of No Return-1954

Starring Robert Mitchum and Marilyn Monroe

Filmed in Jasper and Banff Parks. We will have an intro and 'behind the scenes' talk by Brian Patton

Nov. 22— The Mortal Storm-1940

Starring James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan. Set in 1933 Germany.

Those who are not getting the monthly email notice (giving more details on individual films), but who would like to ; let the museum know and you will be put on the Movie Night email list .

Correction:

In the May 2015 Newsletter , it was stated that Norman and Constance Marples " had three children , a son, Kenneth and daughters Winnie and Molly (Mrs. J.A.Laird.) ”

A note from Sandy Laird corrected this . It should have read :

“They have three children, two sons Kenneth and Geoffrey, and one daughter Molly (Mrs. J.A.Laird).”

Needed: A secretary for the W.D.H.S. starting November 2015. If interested , please contact Margaret Christensen at 250 -342-9434 or any member for more info.

Also, does anyone have an old reel-to-reel tape recorder, in working order, they could donate to the Museum ?

(compiled by Sandy McKay)