

# VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

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Katerina Neufeld - Katie Wieler  
**Kate Boyd**

This week I went to my neighbor to write a story about her spinning wool from her own sheep, to watch her card and spin and to see the lovely patch work quilts made from the wool, to say nothing of the knit mittens, socks and sweaters.

It would be, I thought, an interesting homespun story— a pleasant contrast to more dramatic tales. How wrong we can be !

I heard a tale of Russia in the bloody revolution of 1918 ; a tale of terror , of hunger, of hardship, and finally of flight; and once again the plea, “ Why do the people of Canada not realize how precious freedom is?”

Katerina Neufeld was born in Ignatjevka, Ekaterinoslav on April 30, 1905, five hundred miles south of Moscow. Her parents were storekeepers and she was one of a family of seven. She spent a happy childhood until war broke out in 1914. Then her father had to go into the army so he bought

a bit of land and some cattle as a means of support for his wife and family during his absence. The Russian soldier’s families received no subsistence allowance.

But his well-laid plans went awry. When the army needed meat they came and took the fattest cattle and the sleekest pigs. Later they came and again took more. Katerina said “ Times became very hard for us and for all our neighbors but we did have plenty of fruit, vegetables and eggs. We dried the fruit for the winter, (canning was not heard of) and we made noodles while eggs were plentiful. In 1917 the war was very close to us and we could hear the roar of the cannons. Then suddenly it was over.

With the end of the war came worse times. The revolution had already started and became more terrifying as the months went on. The people lived in constant fear. There were waves of soldiers travelling through the land. Some came on camels, some on mules, and some on horses and we seldom knew what party they represented. They were all terrifying. “I can remember that if the men were on camels we were less frightened because those soldiers were better disciplined. But even so, homes were burned, ministers and others were killed and property was taken. ”

“ We had barely enough food to live on. Thousands were dying of starvation and three years of drought added to our despair. Then the typhoid epidemic started.” Katerina was one of the first victims and she will never know how she recovered. She was left deaf in one ear but otherwise was not impaired. Having regained her strength she was recruited to help nurse the victims— there were hundreds of them.” Almost everyone over 45 years of age who contracted the disease died- they seemed to have no resistance.”

She became accustomed to five and six funerals a week among those she tended. She worked with two doctors who insisted she be given extra food to keep up her strength as they could depend on her as their only nurse. She said there was little medicine. They used herbs, mint to take temperatures down, chamomile tea and thyme, vinegar solutions to wash the patients and rice water to curb diarrhea.

She told me of people waiting for a sick horse to die so they could eat the flesh; of people bringing home gophers to make soup; of how authorities took anything or everything one had and to resist was death. She said she had a gun pointed at her chest when she pleaded with soldiers to leave a farm animal one day. She told of an uncle of her mother who, because he resisted, had his hands tied to a horse's tail and was dragged behind the galloping animal through the streets. Relatives had to beg to remove his battered naked body for burial.

In 1923 Katerina Neufeld married Abram Wieler. He was a Mennonite farmer-preacher and they lived in constant fear because practice of religion was strictly forbidden. "Our people hid their Bibles or gave them up when authorities demanded them. We did not dare go to Church. It would have cost us our lives. But we kept our services going in machine shops or cellars..... wherever we could. They were held at night in the dark or by light of a single candle."

Mr. Wieler had been wealthy but everything was taken from them. Their fine home was taken for a government building and they built another of mud bricks like the peasants.

In 1927, through bribery of officials, they were able to arrange to come to Canada to Winnipeg, where Mrs. Wieler's parents had previously immigrated.

They left everything behind them. They just opened the stable doors to free the livestock, filled the animals water troughs and walked away. Friends helped them and they reached Moscow, then a Baltic port from where they sailed for New York.

It was life re-born after the hardships they left, but there were more hardships ahead. In

1937 Mr. Wieler died. Katie was left with five small children : Abram, John, Elizabeth, Ann , Helen (Mrs. Roy Broadfoot), and Peter. They bought land in Marquette, Manitoba. With the help of the two older boys she built a house, hauled water from a neighbor until they dug their own well 18 feet down with the boys pulling up buckets of mud which Mrs. Wieler dug at the bottom of the shaft. She milked a cow and had chickens, hoed and weeded a vegetable garden, cleared land and in between times drove transport into Winnipeg when labour was short during the war.

Then when a measure of prosperity around their hard effort paid off, they pulled stakes and headed west. The two girls, Helen and Ann, trained and became Nurse's Aids at the St. Eugene Hospital in Cranbrook. John got a job at Fairmont Hot Springs. Mrs. Wieler was offered a job as a camp cook at Canal Flats. Later she cooked at the Windermere Hotel where she met Dave Boyd. They were married and since then had come a period of easier life.

Spinning , carding and sewing, no wonder Kate said to me, " This is nothing ! This is not my story." I was prepared to marvel at a woman who has spun hundreds of miles of wool and knit it into countless garments. My marvel is for the woman who has withstood all she had for this brief resume is a mere fraction of what she told me of their struggles in Canada to make their way. Her courage was for her children. "Such wonderful children!" She said over and over again. " They worked alongside me."

How little we know of our neighbors. How little we credit them for the trials life has lain in their path. How few Canadian women could sustain their courage as Kate Boyd has done.

(Mrs. Ian Weir. March 1960)

Thankyou Stanley Wieler of Wilmer B.C. for the photos and added information.

## **Beauty and Recreational Value of the Windermere Valley**

The beauty and recreational value of the Windermere Valley were appreciated as early as 1908 when the first recreational home was built on the lake. The Adami Estate which occupied the land where the Timber Ridge Development now stands was the summer home of Dr. George Adami, a professor of Pathology at McGill University in Montreal. Dr. Adami and his family would travel to the Valley by train every summer to enjoy boating, horseback riding, golf and other activities.

The history of the Valley goes back beyond 1908. Wilmer had boomed in the 1880's with the mining activity in the mountains to the west. Hotels and services catering to the needs of miners developed. Liquor and gambling were in demand when the men came to town. At the same time, Athalmer was developing as the business centre because of its proximity to the Columbia River where freight was available to them by river boat during the summer. Athalmer at that time was called 'Salmon Beds' because the salmon came here to spawn in the gravel beds in the River. This ended with the building of the Grand Coulee Dam. Wilmer's first name was Peterborough but this was changed because of confusion with Peterborough, Ontario.

Invermere was originally called Copper City by Edmund Johnston who acquired 316 acres of the town-site from the Crown. He ranched part of it but in 1899 sold it to Louis Garnett who represented the Canterbury Town-site Company. The town-site was called Canterbury and the first building was the Canterbury Hotel built in 1899. It only operated 2 years then closed because Wilmer took all the business. The first store was built in Wilmer in 1901 by W.S. Santo.

"The Outcrop", the first newspaper was published for 2 years in Canterbury then in 1902 moved to Wilmer. Growth in the community did not begin for some years. The town-site lots, including the Hotel were sold at a Sheriff's sale at Golden, B.C. in

January 1908 and became the property of the Province of B.C. That same year the town-site was obtained by the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruitland's Ltd. This company was promoting the sale of acreages for farming to immigrants from Britain. Mr. Bruce, president of the company, renamed the town-site Invermere, a Scottish name meaning 'Inver'— out of the mouth and 'mere'- lake. A business district began to develop about 1912 with 3 general stores, Invermere Hotel, a Chinese laundry, a meat market, a garage, a hardware store and many other businesses to follow to lay the foundation for what is today a varied, attractive shopping area meeting the needs of Invermere and surrounding area.

In 1915, recreation was as important to the area as it is today. Records show there was a local hockey team in each village, football teams, several curling rinks, polo fields, a race track, and 2 golf courses to mention a few. These pioneers of the area would not be surprised by the unlimited recreational activities in the Valley today.

( Museum Files )

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### **Golden Star— February 10, 1934**

The outstanding event of the past week was the first attempt at a "talkie" given in the Legion Hall on Monday and Tuesday evenings. The talkie chosen "Cavalcade" was a good drawing picture and although the works didn't quite prove successful the first evening, it went over well on Tuesday. The hall was well filled and the results so encouraging that a contract for future talkies is in the process of being entered into. C.L. Dowsley of Calgary is most enterprising and deserves great credit for his efforts in accomplishing what he did. He proposes to put about \$500.00 worth of equipment into the projecting room of the Legion Hall which will then make it rank amongst the best of the smaller talkie halls in B.C. In about three weeks time, Dr. Dowsley is to have everything completed and will give one talkie a week.

( Museum Files )

## **Horsethief Ranch**

In 1912, Captain Gerald Houlgrave bought L. 171 (80 acres) on the Benches from the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruit Lands. Captain and Mrs. Houlgrave built an attractive house. They had three children. Captain and Mrs. Houlgrave had emigrated from England and Mrs. Houlgrave, like most of the wives, had never been used to doing her own work.

When World War 1 broke out, in 1914, Captain Houlgrave served in the Canadian Merchant Navy until 1919. While he was away, Jack Barbour was caretaker of the Ranch. After W.W. 1 the Houlgrave family moved to Wilmer for schooling of the children. Mrs. Houlgrave died at the birth of their fourth child. After the family left, the ranch was rented or leased.

Houlgrave Lake and road are named in honour of Captain Houlgrave.

In 1938 Tex Woods, a prominent tourist guide in Banff, purchased the Ranch and lived there for awhile. From 1938 to 1948 the house was enlarged to 5 rooms on the ground floor and 2 upstairs.

In the 1940's Patrick ( Paddy ) Houlgrave visited the Valley.

In 1948 Mrs. Dorothy Gow, the daughter of Vernon Woods, owned the property. Mrs. Gow was in residence for part of every year. She was hostess to many guests and entertained lavishly. (Dorothy Gow was Mrs. Ruth Sattmanns sister.)

In 1956 Albert Cooper purchased Horsethief Ranch. As Albert Cooper was a big game guide, he operated

the ranch as a horse ranch and used the horses in his guiding business. He has 32 acres under cultivation as well as hay fields. On Lot 171 there is a small lake which cuts down on cultivation acreage, but makes the property especially attractive as a residence.

In 2018, the Horsethief Ranch is owned by Lise and John Niddrie.

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## **Museum Update**

The Museum opens daily  
Monday to Friday on June 1st.  
10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Summer opening Tea  
is June 23, 2:00 pm.

Guest Speaker—Rotarians 30th Anniversary of Flags.  
Summer Display “ Fashions”. Music by “Second Winds.”

Circle your calendar for May 27th, 2:00pm at the Wilmer Hall. There will be a showing of the movie “Hacksaw” (1971). It is a horse story with significant portions filmed at Lake Enid and in Wilmer.

We have a grant to hire a summer student. If you know of a student looking for work please have him or her phone 250-342-9434 for more information.

(compiled by Sandy McKay)