

VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 November 2019 250-342-9769



Minnie Tunnacliffe (with Marvin 1915)

New Year's Day is a good day to start a good life. New Years Day is the birthday of Mrs. E.E. Tunnacliffe of Invermere who looks back on the years since 1912 when she first came to the Valley and calls them good.

That is not because life has been particularly kind to Minnie Elizabeth Tunnacliffe. She has been widowed twice and bereaved of her only daughter. It is because she is a woman who has learned to count her blessings.

Minnie came to the Starbird Ranch, west of Wilmer, in 1912 as a companion to Mrs. Starbird. Minnie had been born and raised in North Dakota and Mrs. Starbird, who was also an American, had been visiting near Minnie's home. They became friends and Minnie accepted the invitation to come to the Windermere District to share the ranch life at the Starbird place.

It was an invitation which came at an opportune time to a young widow. After nine years of marriage, her husband died very suddenly. Four years of widowhood is a long time for a young woman and the complete change to ranch life in the Rockies gave her

a great lift. "I had a wonderful time," Minnie recalls. "The ranch was run as a hunting lodge. There was riding, picnicking, and hunting trips to the hills when Mrs. Starbird and I would go along with Mr. Starbird and the visiting hunters."

"I was overwhelmed by the magnificent mountain scenery after the flat plains of North Dakota. I liked the people of the valley; their friendliness, their kindness and hospitality."

Then the young widow met Edward E. Tunnacliffe and the good times took on a personal significance. He was hauling freight at the time. They went back to Jamestown, North Dakota, in 1913, to be married and then settled in Wilmer. They lived in a little frame house and their son, Marvin, was born there in 1914. Dr. Hannington was the doctor. Minnie says Mrs. William Weir, who was a nurse, kept a friendly eye on the mother and baby and then her sister, Martha, came from North Dakota and stayed five months.

Their daughter, Marion, was born in 1918. She was a lovely healthy child until nine years of age when she developed diabetes and from then on until her death in 1945 Minnie was devoted to her welfare.

Wilmer was a busy little community in those early days. St. Andrew's Church had been built and wherever there is a church there is activity for its upkeep. The Tunnacliffes were very involved. They used to play for the local dances, too. Minnie played the piano and her husband's fiddle kept many merry dancers tripping the light fantastic. Third member of the trio was fiddler Pat Kelly with his famous Irish smile.

Ed Tunnacliffe was Public Works foreman by then and in 1928 the family moved to Invermere, to the big house on the hill overlooking Lake Windermere.

The Tunnacliffes bought the house which had been built by George Bennet.

Marvin was educated at local schools, then he went to the Calgary Technical School until he joined the RCAF. Marion joined the staff of the Imperial Bank when she left school. Later her health forced her to give up her job.

Marvin was a Pilot-Officer in the Province of Quebec when he heard of his sister's death in Invermere.

When Ed Tunnacliffe retired as Public Works Forman time did not hang heavily on his hands. He had always been a keen citizen of the community, bearing his full share of civic responsibility with a genial, friendly manner that was typical of the man. His death in 1948 was a loss to the community.

In 1988 Minnie made a memorable trip through the Panama to the Virgin Islands and from there to Le Havre and Copenhagen. She and her traveling companion, Mrs. W.H. Cleland, spent six weeks in the Danish capital and came home enthralled with the joys of the trip.

Now Minnie says she has no desire to leave the Valley. "I have always loved it here," she says, "I have no wish to go away."

It must be a fine thing to face the sunset , years later, feeling content with what life has dealt. No bitterness for bereavement; no laments. Contentment with home, family and friends. So much to look back upon. And yet so much to look forward to, also. With two married grandchildren, what else could Minnie be anticipating but a great-grandchild over the horizon.

(Winn Weir Files)

Edgewater 1935-43

Teachers– Miss Ellen Wright, Miss Hester Wright, Don Bilmore, and Lois Kinley. In 1935 there were four pupils in grades 1-8 and in 1943, there were seven. The teacher had to go in early to light the fires. Christmas concerts were the most special time and included the whole community. Parents and teachers all helped to make it a great evening.

The Windermere Hotel

1890-1945

The Windermere Hotel held a Christmas and New Years celebration every year. Prospectors, trappers, ranchers without families, or anyone without home ties would gather.

Food and liquor were available and song and dance continued far into the night and the revelry might last one night or three! Sometimes the revelers would leave on sleighs and make for a remote farm to continue their celebrations.

1912– Never did the walls of the Windermere Hotel echo with more gaiety than they did the Christmas night of 1912. The congenial host was Edgar Stoddart. Holland's construction crew from Fairmont were issued the order to stay in camp and not one drop of cheer was to be had in the bunkhouses! Jack Hooper smuggled in a case of the best into camp and someone suggested going to Windermere. The crew piled into Jack's sleigh pulled by a team of greys and off they went over the 14 miles of snowy trails. The crew - Dapper Ede with his accordion, Jack Woodcroft, pianist, who had a homemade banjo devised from a frying pan, Ernie Dernier who played the tambourine, Sid Brown, another excellent pianist, Onsworth, Harry Bone, Charlie Onion, Teddy Keeling, Burt Chubb, Dick Ridgley, Johanssen, Joe Granger and Sid Powell were a merry bunch.

Never was a singsong more lusty as the Fairmont crew was joined by fellows like Fred Cadwallader and Harry Smith, Bert Schofield, Gaffney, Harry Richardson, Ernie Bryan, August Johnson, Ole, six or more Italians from the KC Railway gang, and the Chinese cooks. So instead of a bleak , lonely Christmas, they were showered with merriment and companionship. That Christmas, the singsong was lusty. They learned a new song that night. They discovered that "Land of Hope and Glory" mixed with the National Anthems of Sweden, China, Italy and a few other countries comprised a new song, "Oh Canada."

"The Legacy of Fairmont"
Janet Wilder

**From the Phyllis Falconer (nee Young)
files
Early 1900's**

The McCarthys

On the edge of the Benches, to the North side of the Wilmer road is where the McCarthy's (USA) made a large place. They came in 1911, had no children and were both great mountain climbers and horse back riders. They made many climbs with Conrad Kain. Their house was a large beautiful lodge with also a wonderful view over Wilmer. They built splendid barns, etc. and kept fine riding horses. I think they had the most fruit of anyone— acres of apples and smaller fruits. They also were very good to me and took me on their riding trips. At one time they wished to adopt me. Much later they bought Dr. Turnor's place that joined theirs. The ranch was called "Karmax" and was a lovely place in those days. When my parents had to go back to England in 1913, McCarthy's bought a very old oak sideboard from them. When we returned in 1919 they gave it back. Sometime in the 1920's the McCarthy's started another ranch southwest of Invermere known as the K2 Ranch and their place went to Mr. and Mrs. Jack Graham.

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Barbour

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Barbour, a young couple, seem to have been the first to arrive on the Benches. In 1900 they came with teams of horses, pack horses and wagons from the USA. Jack was in the valley in 1886 working for the C.P.R. but he returned to the USA and brought his wife.

Jack was a contractor. He built roads and bridges with his horses. He had fine strong work horses. They took land at what is now known as Barbour's Lake and Rock. Mrs. Barbour was a wonderful woman and very kind to my mother, showing her how to cook, etc. She would ride a horse all the way to Wilmer for goods. They had four sons: Edward, Bert, Harry and George. These she would leave at her ranch when she had to go

to Wilmer and they were told to stay in the house and not light a lamp. Much later, the Barbour's went to Wilmer to live for schooling for the boy's.

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 first took Neave's place west of Lake Lillian and called it 'Westlake.' They took the Martin's place, later. They had five children— mostly grownup: Phyllis, Evelyn, Babs and twins Angela and Nigel. Mrs. Poett was an American and Roman Catholic.

They built a large three story house and I believe 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 the next day and the lake was dragged for a week before his body was found. Mrs. Poett's sister was Mrs. Coats, (of P. Coats Cotton) and had land joining the Poetts'. Later it became all one farm. The road in those days from Invermere went by Wilmer and was just a track for horses and wagons or sleighs in winter. Everyone drove horses or rode them.

Poett's went back to England for the 1914-1918 war and never came back. The place sold to the Laird's and later the Kellys. (Jenny and George Richardson own the property today. 2019)

Captain Robinson and Mr. Norring

Captain Robinson and Mr. Norring were partners and had a small place on the banks of Toby Creek. In 1912 Norring was drowned in Lake Lillian and Robinson went back for the 1914 war and never returned. The place was sold to Arthur Newton, then Graham and George Watt and is now Nolan Rad's.

Windermere Valley Museum Complex

The Train Station— In 1975, a coal train had derailed, demolishing the Lake Windermere Station. For \$1.00 the Windermere District Historical Society purchased what was left of the station and moved it to the top of the hill. There on a large open field the Society was able to lease a spot for the building which would be the Main Building for the Museum Complex. Then restoration began. The double doors, at the end of the station needed the most work and a full cement foundation was needed. The interior displays also required a lot of work. In 1978, negotiations started with the Village Council for the moving of the Legion Building and the Pioneer Cabin from its present site at the Pot Hole Park to the site of the Station where it was to become part of the Museum Complex in a park like setting at the entrance to the Village.

The School House— In 1981, a 1906 log building became available that had been the very first Brisco School House. The building was sitting on the farm of Bob Mitchell in Brisco where it was used for storage. Through the co-operation of Bob Mitchell and Lloyd Watkins, the building was moved to the Windermere Valley Museum Complex with the help of a Provincial Heritage Grant. There it was restored as a Pioneer Classroom with assistance from the memories of a few early students of the school, such as the Mitchells, Watkins and Harrisons. Today (2019) it is an active display area where you can sit in an old desk and visualize yourself as a student in the early 1900's.

(Museum Files)

Museum Update

The Summer Theme at the museum for 2020 is Heritage Buildings. A committee has been formed under the leadership of Sue MacDonald to research Heritage Buildings from Spillimacheen to Canal Flats.

We are looking for photos, names of the builders, possible previous owners, and anything else that makes the Heritage Building interesting. This research will be part of the Summer Display.

The Museum is open on Tuesdays from 10 am to 4 pm. A good time for drop-offs.

Provincial Heritage Week is the 3rd week of February.

The theme is “Bringing the Past into the Future.”

This certainly matches our Summer Theme.

The museum gatherings will continue with some possible alterations. We are looking for ideas in order to bring more people to the Museum. If you have an idea, please let the President, Margaret Christensen know or any Executive member, as we are open to suggestions.

November is our Membership Drive and renewals as well as new memberships have been coming in daily. A big “Thank You” to you all.

2020

Executive Windermere District Historical Society

President— Margaret Christensen

Secretary— Donna Tunnacliffe

Treasurer—Josette Jarche

Directors— Louise Frame

Anne Keely

Audrey Mantyka

Sandy McKay

Sherry Dewey

Sandi Jones

Sue MacDonald

Paul Yezovich

Old Time Movies at the Museum

Winter Program

2020

Sunday evenings 7 pm.

January 19— Naughty Marietta- 1935

Marietta is a French Princess who escapes an arranged marriage to a man she doesn't like by sailing incognito to Colonial New Orleans.

February 23— Harvey— 1950

Elwood P. Dowd (James Stewart) is a good natured man who has a six-foot plus invisible rabbit as a friend.

(Compiled by Sandy McKay)