

VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A 1K0 November 2020 250-342-9769



**William Weir
1913**

William Weir was born on February 15, 1884 in East Kilbride in Scotland. Mr. Weir came to Toronto in 1911 and to the Columbia Valley in 1912 with Alec Dobbie and Cecil Davidson. His wife, the former Jean McMartin, followed him in 1913 and they were married in Wilmer, B.C. Mrs. Weir was one of the first nurses at the Wilmer Hospital. They lived in Wilmer from 1913-1916 at which time they moved to Invermere. Mr. Weir was employed by the Invermere Contracting Company of which he later became a partner.

He was a man of many interests with music being his favourite recreation. He was instrumental in producing several Gilbert and Sullivan musicals locally and was always generous with his time and talent. His garden was a show place for many years.

Mr. Weir served on the hospital board for many years and was a school trustee for many more. He was a commissioner on the Village Council from 1953-1956; was an active member of the Windermere District Board of Trade; a member of the Community Centre Board of Directors and a member of Columbia Lodge AF and AM.

In 1953 Mr. Weir was appointed as a

stipendiary magistrate for the district and in 1957 as juvenile judge. He was later made magistrate of extended jurisdiction. He retired from this position in 1948. In 1951 he retired from the Contracting Company. In 1958 at Centennial Celebrations, he was awarded a Centennial Scroll of Merit for Citizenship. During the war, Mr. Weir was active in raising funds for War Loan Drives.

William Weir and Jean McMartin Weir had two children, Ian and Jenny, who were raised in the Valley.

William Weir died at Invermere in August 1964.

(Museum Files)

August 23, 1928

B.G. Hamilton took this excerpt from the Journal of Alexander Henry Jr., fur-trader of the North West Company who was in this area February 1811.

Henry makes reference to the Kootenay Indians and says,

“They have the reputation of a brave and war-like nation though the whole tribe does not exceed fifty families.”

Further on he says, “ Wild horses are also common and frequently seen in large gangs. They are caught in winter, when the snow is deep, by running them down with relays of fresh horses, or driving them up the mountains in the deepest snow, or into some narrow mountain pass. A noose is thrown around their neck and they are taken, exhausted, and instantly mounted and broken to saddle. Their respiration through the nostrils is much louder than would be imagined. When surprised, they can be heard at the distance of 500 yards. Some of them are exceedingly swift, well-proportioned and handsome beasts, but they seldom attain the docility of our horses.

Valley News September 1943

Pte. Carl Jones, Overseas, has continued the excellent record he made last year in the sports arena. This year, "Somewhere in Scotland," he won a collection of trophies that won't all go in one duffle bag. These include a gold medal, a silver medal and a silver cup.

Roy Clement is now acting-sergeant. Leigh Nixon has been promoted to Corporal, and Jim Ashworth won his commission in the field as Pilot-Officer. He is serving in India.

When the old high level flume on the Benches was dismantled recently for the building of a new one, the names of several local boys were found carved on the old structure. Among them were Jack and Dave Nixon, Sandy Dobbie, Bud Coy, Bud Cleland and Alex Johnston.

Work is progressing on the new bridge over Toby creek. The new structure is up stream of the old bridge. Construction is under the direction of Ed Tunnacliffe.

At the fall Fair, the Indians took part in a costume parade and tribal dance. Gabriel Paul won first prize and Louis Joseph second prize for costumes.

A Memorial Service was held at St. Eugene Mission for Pte. Toby Nicholas, killed in action in Sicily.

Dr. A.E. Kydd, who has served the district as medical practitioner for two years has left.

Miss Audrey Cleland will be married to Mr. Charles Osterloh of Kimberly this month. She has been on the staff of the Imperial Bank. Miss Dorothy Blake has joined the staff in her place.

Work at the Paradise Mine is progressing favorably. The mine is now owned by Sheep Creek Gold Mines Ltd. Nelson.

(Museum Files)

First Resident Physician A Tribute to Dr. Robert Elliott

In the Autumn of 1899, a passenger on the S.S. Duchess, Dr. Robert Elliott, landed at Windermere, then the only settlement in the district. Fresh from the Western University of London Ontario, he took up residence in the new part of the Windermere Hotel, just completed. Dr. Elliott was young, in his 20th year. Tall, with a small black mustache and dressed in somber black, of the professional man of those days, he looked as he probably hoped to more than his age.

The town of Athalmer was the Salmon Beds and a Government bridge was under way to replace the boats used to cross the Columbia River. The recent discovery of the Paradise Mine and the Red Line (Ptarmigan) had brought in many prospectors and mining men. At Jim Stoddart's cattle corral H.E. Neave started a mining camp, first called Peterborough and later Wilmer. This location being nearer the mines, a toad-stool sprang up and to its credit, never became a mushroom town. Dr. Elliott located here the following spring and remained until he moved to Corbin years later. While in Peterborough (1900-1909), he married the first school teacher, Miss Ford.

He came at the end of a period; the last of the horse and buggy doctors and the beginning of the automotive age. He also saw the last of the pioneer cowboys, prospectors and transient miners. Rough men, ready men, men of hope and vision challenging a wilderness in hope of fortune. Dr. Elliott's bedside manner was the manner of the times; he did not pussy-foot in. He was assurance personified. His patient, unless suffering from an accident, (like having nothing worse than a hang-over), would receive a dose from the doctor that would cure an army of mules of colic. He would soon be in the saddle and on the trail to the mountains.

Dr. Robert Elliott, the few remaining early old timers will remember with respect and a pioneer to whom posterity owes much.

(Charles D. Ellis 1943)

Old-timers Recall Severe Winters of the Past

35 below zeroSo you think it's cold? Tish, man, listen to the tales of some of the old-timers. According to Indian tales of 1866 there was a snowfall of 12 feet that winter! The elk could not move through the valley and died by the hundreds. Years later, when the white settlers came to the district they asked about the hundreds of elk antlers rotting on the valley floor and were told of the snow that killed the game. It meant good eating that year for the Indians. The women went out and killed the elk where they lay. The years that followed were presumably lean years as far as elk meat was concerned and one old-timer goes so far as to say that only in recent years is the elk herd being built up.

The winter of 1892-93 was very cold and in November 1894, there was a tremendously heavy snowfall followed by severe floods in the spring. That was the year that a horseman swan his horse across the Athalmer Flats, from the river to somewhere near the vicinity of the CPR Station and said his horse's feet did not touch bottom all the way.

In 1886 another very severe winter is reported with many head of cattle lost in the valley and this loss was repeated in the winter of 1893.

Mr. J.S. Johnston of Invermere, whose diary of his early days in the valley reveals much information tells of the record snowfall of May 24, 1904 when two feet of snow stopped farmers in their tracks.

Lava Talc - a valuable war material unobtainable from former sources is being mined (1943) in Kootenay National Park. Production of 40 tons monthly is planned. This is the only known source of Lava Talc in Canada. The talc is used in the manufacture of radio equipment. The talc field was discovered twenty years ago.

Water and Community - 1912

Water was one of the first services to be provided. In Windermere there were 2 wells. One for the Windermere Hotel and one for the White House Lodge. Everyone else got their water from the lake or from Windermere Creek and it was hauled by teams of horses and wagon or sleigh with large barrels. The cost was 25 cents per barrel.

An irrigation system was begun early on in Wilmer. The water came from a reservoir on Wilmer Creek (Munn Lake.) Ditches and flumes were established for farming and gardening. A water tower was constructed to provide domestic water for the homes. Athalmer got its water from the river or lake. Invermere had an irrigation system with ditches and flumes for gardens and piped water for homes. It came from the Paddy Ryan Lakes via Ben Abel Creek.

A community hall was built early on in most communities. These would be used for community concerts where everyone would participate, for dances and for meetings and other gatherings. If there were no hall then the schoolhouse was often used. By 1912 in Athalmer there was a Social Club. This group sponsored weekly dances. In Windermere and Wilmer much earlier than this there were Drama Groups that put on plays, musicals and other concerts. Parties were held in family homes and nearly every household had someone who could play the violin, banjo, accordion or other instrument. Pianos were not so common as they were very expensive to purchase and difficult to move. Many of the settlers from Britain brought pianos with them.

In the 1920's and early 30's when Invermere was still a very small town, most of the community would gather at the Invermere Hotel to have Christmas dinner together. This would include all the single people who had no family to go to.

(Jaryl McIsaac Files)

Columbia Valley Times

Athalmer 1912

“Turning the Tables”

In some cases counsel receives answers to questions that they had no business to put, which, if not quite to their liking, are what they justly deserve. The following story of George Clarke, a celebrated minstrel, is a case in point. On one occasion, when being examined as a witness, he was severely interrogated by a lawyer.

‘You are in the minstrel business, I believe?’

Inquired the lawyer.

“Yes Sir,” was the reply.

“Is not that rather a low calling?”

“I don’t know what it is sir,” replied the minstrel, “But it is so much better than my father’s that I am rather proud of it.”

The lawyer fell into the trap.

“What was your father’s calling?” He inquired

“He was a lawyer”, replied Clarke, in a tone that sent the whole Court into a roar of laughter as the discomfited lawyer sat down.

January 5,1913

Second Annual Wilmer Bonspiel

“In replying to the toast to the Golden visitors, Charles A. Warren caused great amusement by his reference to the ‘difficulties and hardships of the way’ incurred in getting to Wilmer. The first hardship, he said was 27 below; the second was two bottles of Scotch, and the third was two more bottles of Scotch. The last and greatest of all was two more bottles of Scotch. But in spite of these hardships, he would certainly come again next year.”

May 17,1929

“The first pair of twins on record to be born in the Windermere District Hospital were recorded last month to the honor and glory of Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Tegart of Windermere. A son and daughter were presented to the proud father and mother. (Ken and Patricia Tegart) For all the writer has heard to the contrary, this is the first time that the Windermere district Hospital has been honored with such an event.”

AGM

To all members of the Windermere District Historical Society (WDHS)

The Annual General Meeting will be held on November 19 at the Museum. Because of Covid 19, the procedure will be different.

- The notice of the meeting will be sent via this Newsletter.
- The meeting will be held at the Museum, outdoors with no program.
- The meeting will include the Financial Report, the Annual Report and the election of Officers.
- Chairing the election of officers will be Karen Brown.
- Officers willing to be elected are:

President: Margaret Christensen,

Secretary: Donna Tunnacliffe,

Treasurer: Josette Jarch,

Directors: Louise Frame, Anne Keely, Sandy McKay, Audrey Mantyka, Sherry Dewey, Sandi Jones, Sue Macdonald, and Paul Yezovich.

If you are willing to “run” for one of these positions, please notify the President at maed1@telus.net.

Note: we do need a vice-president.

Thank You

The Columbia Valley Community Foundation (valleyfoundation.ca) and The Sherry and Harvey Doerr Family Fund generously provided a grant to the Historical Society for Exhibit Enhancement. With the funds we have purchased portable display panels, signage accessories, improved existing signage as well as developed a display which recognizes historic buildings, built prior to 1919 and still standing. This is the third grant the Foundation has given us and we are so grateful for their continuing support.

We have two secure vaults in the basement of the main museum building which house a large variety of artifacts and documents relating to the Columbia Valley. We are therefore able to continually change and evolve the displays.

Take time to come and visit or make a return visit—you won’t be disappointed!