

VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

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Lucy Northcott Weir

Lucy Northcott was born in Rapid City, Manitoba in 1914.

Her father, Sydney Herbert Northcott was born in England. He immigrated to Canada with 2 brothers and settled in Manitoba for several years. He married there, had Lucy and then moved to an apple orchard in the Coldstream area in the Okanagan. In 1957 the family moved to Invermere. He worked for a time for William Weir at the Shell Oil Bulk Plant. He was involved with the Anglican Church. He participated as a Sidesman and helped with the collection. There are 2 stained glass windows in the Anglican/United Church in memory of Sydney and his wife, Lucy. They planted fruit trees that lasted for many years.

Lucy Bracewell Northcott was born in Scotland. She immigrated to Manitoba with her Mother and two sisters. When she married Sydney, she left her family in Manitoba. They had Stanley, Herbert and Joan following Lucy. She was a keen gardener and bridge player. She was very positive in nature in spite of severe arthritis most of her life. They retired in Invermere.

Sydney passed away in 1969 and Lucy in 1978.

After high school, daughter Lucy attended

Normal School. She taught for one year at a one room school in Tappen, not far from Sicamous, B.C.

Lucy loved to swim and when she saw that she would be able to swim year round at Lake Windermere and Radium Hot Springs she happily accepted a job teaching at Radium, another one room school. She boarded at the Blakley's Hotel by the pool and walked daily to the townsite of Radium. This was 1936.

William Weir was directing a musical in Invermere and needed more singers. It was said that the new teacher in Radium was a singer. He approached her and found that although she was eager to take part, she had no transportation. He promised a driver and Lucy was able to attend the practices of The Mikado.

Ian Weir, Mr. Weir's son, said that once he needed to buy gas by the drum, it was time to propose!

Ian and Lucy Weir were married in 1938 and began raising a family of four. During the war they moved frequently from Abbotsford to Caron, Saskatchewan. Lucy remarked that in one house they weren't there long enough to hang the curtains. Lucy needed to retire from teaching because of a policy which didn't allow married women to remain in teaching.

In the mid 1950's, Lucy started a kindergarten in the basement of their home.

(2020 Strands Restaurant sold. The building is used once again for child care.)

At that time formal schooling began in grade one. The kindergarten continued for several years. Eventually, Lucy was once again offered teaching positions. She taught at the elementary and secondary levels. Her final position was librarian at the Invermere Elementary School and District Librarian. She would deliver books up and down the valley from Canal Flats to Spillimacheen.

The kids loved the books she hand picked for them and the teachers loved the popcorn she made for recess.

Before returning to teaching Lucy served on the School Board. She had to step down over a conflict of interest. Her husband Ian was selling fuel oil for the schools up the Valley! Lucy served on the Invermere Council. Her main goal was to see the streets of Invermere paved.

In the mid 60's the Weirs bought the CPR Lodge. What started as a summer home became their full time residence. Near the end of her life, Lucy wondered what would become of the Lodge, their home of 40 years. Both Ian and Lucy would be thrilled to know it was moved to Lake Dorothy with a magnificent view of Mt. Nelson.

Lucy was a true entrepreneur. She bought a lot from her in-laws and built her first rental house. An employee of Weir Motors was her first renter. Over the years she bought more houses, some of which were moved to town from the Mineral King Mine. At one time she and Ian had teachers boarding with them as there were no places to rent. When she was finished as a landlord, she owned seven rentals.

Lucy played bridge and golf but her favorite pastime was traveling. She made her first trip abroad after she turned forty and she managed to visit every continent but South America and Antarctica.

Lucy spent most of her life living happily in Invermere.

(Submitted by Nancy Weir Ballard)

1937-38-Radium School

Miss Lucy Northcott, teacher, earned \$21.70 a month. \$8.10 was spent on textbooks and \$5.57 on school supplies. \$450.00 was received from the Provincial Government for the whole year.

(Museum Files)

1911

Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruit Lands

The Columbia Valley was largely inhabited by miners and prospectors or the storekeepers, hotel owners, liverymen blacksmiths and others who provided services to the miners. Some of the miners, prospectors or businesses settled on farms where they engaged in mixed farming to meet their own needs. At the same time there were over 60 men in camp at the Paradise Mine. It fell upon Mr. Bruce, the owner/manager of the mine to find food to feed the crews. He found he had to import canned goods from Ontario. Having lived in the Valley and being an avid gardener himself, he decided to plant potatoes, carrots and cabbages and other vegetables to help feed the crews. He was very successful with this venture. About 1904, Mr. Bruce started a nursery to provide hardy stock to local farmers to improve their yields.

From this beginning evolved the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruit Lands Co. Ltd., (C.V.I.) which controlled 50,000 acres of selected land on which an irrigation system was constructed. The land was advertised for settlement. Mr. E. Mallendaine was appointed manager in charge of construction and settlement. He had been the founder of a successful colony at Creston, a Chief Timber Ranger and Land Agent for the C.P.R. The C.P.R. had promised, in 1905, to begin construction on the Kootenay Central Railway to service the Columbia Valley. They built the line 15 miles south of Golden and the bottom fell out of the mining boom. Construction began again, however, in 1910 and the CVI felt this would give access to vast prairie markets for agricultural products from the Columbia Valley. By April 1911 of the total 50,000 acres, 15,000 were irrigated. In 1911-1912, the industrial and political unrest in Great Britain resulted in greatly increased immigration to Canada and Australia. Conservative Britons with capital were turning from the threatened increase of taxation on lands in Britain, toward Canada

where they saw opportunities for investment. Mr. E. Mallendaine, on behalf of the CVI, spent the first three months of 1912 in the United Kingdom promoting the Columbia Valley. A party of about 90 heads of families was organized and left Liverpool April 5 to take up land in the Columbia Valley. The men were to bring their families later.

As part of his advertising campaign, Mr. Mallendaine interviewed and took testimonies from farmers who had been in the Valley since 1884. These farmers had successfully grown apples, small fruits such as raspberries and strawberries and other garden produce for 15 or more years. The CVI was marketing the farms in parcels of 20 or more acres.

The abundance of wildlife for hunting and lakes for fishing was an attraction for many of the settlers as was the spectacular scenery. By 1911, in the vicinity of the new townsite of Invermere, golf links and a race course were laid out and in use. In winter, hockey, curling and ice boating were enjoyed.

(Museum Files)

Columbia Valley Times 1913

“ The present commercial centres of the district are all situated in and around Windermere Lake. Of these , Windermere takes precedence for age, Athalmer and Wilmer following next in order and Invermere as the youngest of all. There are chartered banks in all towns. Each place has its advantages, notably Athalmer with its business houses and electric light system, Wilmer with its local government office and Invermere with its comfortable tourist hotel and gravity system of water works. The future destiny of all these places lies largely in its own hands and that of the oncoming Kootenay Central Railway.”

Did you know that.....

The first threshing machine operated in the Windermere District was owned by Eugene Couture in 1890. It was operated by horsepower. Couture used it on various valley farms. The farmers provided the horses which had to be changed off, two hours on, two hours off. It was worked on the treadmill principle.

The second threshing machine used in the district was owned by Baptiste Morigeau.

Further information concerning the naming of valley creeks has been given by Mr. Hope Brewer.

Dutch Creek was named after “Dutchy”, a placer miner in that vicinity.

Salter Creek was named after “ Old Man Salter” who had a shack on the south side of the creek.

Brady Creek was named after James Brady who also had a place on Findlay Creek. He was a land surveyor who later lived in Golden.

Sir Winston Churchill visited the Windermere Valley in 1929. Accompanied by his son, Randolph and his brother, Major John Churchill, and his son, John. Sir Winston spent a week at the Radium Hot Springs Lodge which was then operated by Miss Charlotte Armstrong.

Miss Armstrong told the story to Mr. and Mrs. Duncan MacIntosh who purchased the lodge from her.

Armstrong told them that when the official car drew up, Sir Winston lost no time with preliminary pleasantries. Emerging from the car he came at once to the point.

“ What have you for dinner?”

The Radium Hot Springs Lodge was built by the CPR in 1922, was razed in 1957 and many of the bungalows were later moved to conform with plans of the federal government. The actual cabin in which Sir Winston stayed while at the springs was purchased by Bruce Downey and moved to his property at Fairmont.

Notary Building

1985 finds another Historic Building on the move. The building was built around the beginning of the 1900's on the main street of Athalmer. It was first used by Notary Frank Richardson. For many years it sat empty until it was purchased by the Farmers' Institute to be used as an office at their Co-op feed store out at the Crossroads, where they had property. In the early 1980's, the Farmer's Institute built a new building for their feed store which included an office inside the building. This left the Notary building sitting empty once again until, J.P. Peacock, a lawyer from Calgary noticed it in 1985. By 1988, Mr. Peacock and many of his friends had purchased the building and had it moved and established on the Museum Complex grounds. It houses a Notary display, a store display and a typewriter display. The Lawyers' names can be seen on a plaque in the Notary Building.

Memories of Pack Trips (By Madeline Turnor)

1916- My first trip by pack train into the mountains took place in 1916. In July, the MacCarthys were taking a party of friends up Jumbo and Toby Creek for mountain climbing and exploration. I was asked to go along to help Mrs. MacCarthy with the cooking and other chores. We all met at Jack Pine, driving there by horse and democrat, where the pack train was waiting with guide, Bill Williams from the Shuswap Reserve and Konrad Kain who was the Austrian mountain guide.

We climbed Mt. Nelson the next day and from there went up the north fork of Toby Creek where several peaks were climbed. From there we went up Jumbo Creek and branched off from the head of the south fork where Mt. Truce and Mt. Cauldron were ascended. I stayed in camp to look after some of the party not climbing. We stayed there several days before going down again to the Toby Creek Trail and on to Earl Grey Pass to climb there, but a heavy snowstorm made climbing too dangerous. On the way down from the pass we lost one of our pack horses, who was not shod and slipped turning a corner on the wet slippery trail, falling to the moraine below. I was left to look after the pack train while the men went down to find the horse. He was badly hurt and had to be shot. They carried the packs up

and put them on other animals. We did not have saddle horses, except for the packer, and all of us walked on the trail. It was tough going too! After leaving the north fork of Toby Creek, we stayed the night at the Earl Grey cabin, which was a beautiful cabin then, having been built about 1908.

1917- During this season, I made my first trip to Lake of the Hanging Glaciers. Mrs. MacCarthy, Mr. Pinniman and I took our saddle horses, a blanket and some grub to ride from Karmak Ranch to spend a day at the lake. We were looking rather like the White Knight from "Alice in Wonderland" with pots and pans dangling from saddles.

1918- Mrs. MacCarthy, Konrad Kain and myself went on a hunting trip in October up the Palliser River after goat with Bill Williams as packer. We saw our first elk (then protected) and I got my first goat!

(Museum Files)

Museum Update

The Museum is once again open for gatherings with Covid guidelines.

The 2021 summer display covers the Columbia Valley from Canal Flats in the south to Spillimacheen in the north, including all the communities in between. You will be entertained with the history of each community and pictures of their historic buildings, built prior to 1919 (and still standing). During August and September the Museum is open Thursday to Monday, 10am to 4pm (closed Tuesday/Wednesday). The grounds are always available. New outdoor 'info' boards have been installed to create a 'wander' around the grounds more interesting. The Notary building has been painted by "Cabin Care", with thanks to a grant from the Invermere Rotarians. Also, the Rotarians continue to look after the Provincial flags which fly with a welcome to the Museum and Invermere.

Ed note:

Many Valley residents attended Mrs. Weirs kindergarten classes in the late 1950' and 60's. We would love to hear any stories you have to tell. We can add them to her file. For me, kindergarten was the first time I had ever had hot chocolate. Good memories.

(Compiled by: Sandy McKay)