

VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

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Gladys Pitts 1914

Gladys Pitts was born at Donald, B.C. In 1900 she remembers her father, pioneer J.C. Pitts, helping to tear down St. Peter's church at Donald, the "Stolen Church" that has brought fame to the lovely lakeside village of Windermere. She remembers their own home being torn down, too, and how the Pitts family lived in the old log house over looking the lake, which had been the RCMP barracks, while their home was being rebuilt a short distance across the road.

Gladys remembers attending school in the little log schoolhouse with her cousin, Vaughan Kimpton, Hope Brewer, Walter Stoddart, Sinclair Craig, a number of the Tegart children and some of the Morigeau children. She says they never missed a Sunday service at St. Peter's where Mrs. Pitts (Gladys mother), played the organ and led the singing. Sunday afternoon we had a family walk and Sunday evening we were taught our catechism.

Miss Pitts learnt to play the piano from Mrs. Smythe, wife of the Anglican clergyman and from Mrs. Billy Taynton. She made good use of their tuition because there were many years when Gladys played for every dance in the Valley. Lew Deal played the violin and Bill Hillier the drums. There was never better rhythm than what

those three could produce for dancing. Music has always meant a lot to Miss Pitts and her piano has always been a joy to her, as are her records of which she has a large and fine collection. So are her books. She has a great many of those, too. And there has always been a garden. The large garden at the Pitts' residence in Windermere was a lovely, hospitable place. And if anyone goes around to the back of the old Invermere Post Office, they can see the care and affection lavished on the fine garden that has been created there.

No family in the Valley enjoyed a greater esteem in its day than the Pitts family. There were four daughters: Gladys, Greta (Mrs. S. Owen), Dorothy (Dot, Mrs. Frank Jones), Muriel (Mrs. Gordon Kenning). J.C. Pitts, as Mr. Pitts was known, had a heart of gold, which, incidentally, his eldest daughter inherited although she tries hiding it at times under a brusque manner. There was a time when Gladys knit something for every baby born in the village or environs. Babies come too fast now for such activity and she has been too busy of recent years as post office work became heavier, but the spirit of kindness has never lagged and there are many to testify to it.

J.C. Pitts and Rufus Kimpton were in partnership in Windermere after the move from Donald. Later they dissolved the partnership, Mr. Kimpton taking the ranch and the stage coach and Mr. Pitts, the store at Windermere. Later, there was the store at Invermere known as "Pitts and Hankey." When Jim Hankey went overseas after 1914, Roy Stoddart looked after the Invermere store and later still A.E. Fisher was in charge. Then Mr. Fisher went into business for himself and Mr. Pitts came to take over the Invermere business. Miss Pitts was by then postmistress at Windermere. When her father died in 1935 she became Invermere postmistress.

When her mother died three years later, she found the family home too large and too much to look after and she moved to Invermere to live. Gladys continued to run the store and the post office in Invermere until 1954. The building was eventually purchased by Pat Bavin.

When the Echo interviewed Gladys for this story, she did not know that she was to be guest of honour at a large community party, with a presentation. When she heard about it, her reply was typical: "That's darn nice," she said. Her remark was an echo of the remarks made when Invermere and Windermere people heard of the proposed party. "That's nice, we'll be there." And like so many good things the party grew as more and more said, "We'll be there."

How fitting that so many wanted to honour someone who has been a definite part of the towns of both Windermere and Invermere.

(Winn Weir Files)

Athalmer Meat Market

J.L Snook was the proprietor in 1902 (Wilmer Outcrop.) J.L. McKay owned the company at one time and in 1909 Wes Dawson worked there before starting his livery business. J.L. McKay built a new building in 1911 at the rivers edge. J. McCroskie was the manager. From 1932-1937 J. Pietrosky Sr. opened and operated the Athalmer Meat Market. In 1938 Wing Sung from Wilmer took over. He sold groceries. In 1940 the building was destroyed. Wong Sam Laundry opened in 1911 in Athalmer on Laurier St. beside the Coronation Hotel. And across from the Coronation Hotel, Kwong Chung Lung Co. opened a restaurant. It was open all day and all night selling wares such as fresh fruit, candy, baked goods and Chinese goods. 1913- Mr. Jones of Athalmer is agent for several makes of autos and has already placed a number of cars in the district. We shall look shortly for the formation of a local automobile club.

1929 Museum Files

The epoch making flight of Messrs. Rutledge and Payne from Calgary to Vancouver in an airplane in a bee line crossing this district about Radium Hot Springs has been watched with great interest. Last week Captain John S. Blakley surprised and pleased the local residents by his flight from his airdrome to this part and after circling about the centres made several landings upon Lake Windermere before he returned home, plainly demonstrating how simple it is for an experienced man to make landings in this neighborhood either in summer or in winter.

Merrymakers returning from parties early Sunday morning were surprised by finding the sky above Wilmer made lured from the quick hot tongues of flame which on closer approach were found to be issuing from the historic pile of the Wing Sun Company's popular emporium. In spite of almost heroic work of the villagers and of those who dwell in Invermere and Windermere who were attracted by the light the whole of this huge frame building, a small private garage and one or two log shacks close by went up in flames. Nothing is now left to mark the whereabouts of these halls of revelry save smoking timbers and holes in the ground which once were part and parcel of the old Union Hotel and log shacks of some of the early village fathers. Great sympathy is expressed towards Wing Sun who is the great loser. This great store and restaurant was erected in 1901 by William Chamberlain and was presided over by him as the Union Hotel. For many years it was vacant then became the districts hospital for a time. At last it fell into the hands of Wing Sun. Amongst the few lives that were saved were those of two fat porkers, otherwise everything in the building or on the surrounding premises fell a prey to the flames. It was only the untiring efforts of those present which prevented most of the buildings of the lower part of the townsite from going up in smoke.

Fifty Years ago (By Tommy King— 1963)

1913— Oldtimers who lived along the Windermere end of the wagon road from Golden to the Athalmer Crossroads included Danny Campbell, 49 miles from Golden; Harry Atchison 51 miles; behind his place was Alfred Mitchell, 52 ; Ed Watkins, 53 miles; George Mitchell, off the main road; Dave Marmon on the North Vermillion and below him nearer the river , the Elk Park Ranching Co's holdings called the Lower Ranch.

Dave Larmour's ranch was at the 62 mile and the McKay Ranch at the 66 mile mark. Eugene Couture lived on Shuswap Creek and up the creek was Jim Lambert and further south his brother, Jack. The Bernie ranch was off the road. Baptiste Morigeau (born here in 1846) owned the land on the corner where the Fair grounds now are.

The first homestead taken up in the Windermere District is now the Elkhorn Ranch and the owner was Mr. Hope Johnstone who afterwards owned the Calgary Herald. He had the first water rights on Windermere Creek.

There was no settlement on the west side of the Columbia north of Spillimacheen. But south there was Bert Lowe, George Heffner, Alex Macauley, Jim Montgomery, William Bott, Baptiste Paul, Ben Able, H.E. Forster and Mr. Perry.

The mail into the district was weekly. Rufus Kimpton had the contract in my time. The mail left Windermere Thursday morning and arrived at Golden Friday evening. An overnight stop had been made at Spillimacheen. It left Golden Sunday mornings and arrived at Windermere Monday evening.

A year prior to my arrival with the advent of CPR trains the stage carrying passengers and mail continued through to Fort Steele, a four day trip each way and freight took seven days at the price of \$7.00 a Cwt. The arrival of trains to Cranbrook in 1898 severed connection between Golden and Fort Steele.

Settlement in the Valley was slow until 1911. Then a couple of big land companies had been formed and many families bought land.

Forty years ago I had a road contract in the Windermere country from Stoddart Creek to the Athalmer Crossroads. Later I was sent to finish roads not done to the satisfaction of the engineers at Dutch Creek and Brady Creek. In the crew of 25 men, I had 15 Indians among them Moses Michel, Alex Paul, Martin Sam, Adrian Tenese and Mike Paul, and a finer lot of fellows could not be desired. It was one of my happiest summers. Louie Paul , then Chief of the Shuswap's, was very co-operative. Martin Morigeau, now the Chief.

(Museum files)

Columbia Valley Times **March 15, 1913**

“The Aladdin mantle lamp is one of the greatest and most practical inventions of the age. It is the highest achievement of science in connection with artificial lighting. It has solved the lighting problem for rural homes, giving them a brilliant white light superior to the gas or electricity used in big cities. A light that makes evenings reading, writing or sewing a pleasure. It's as far ahead of the ordinary oil lamp as the ordinary lamp is ahead of the candles used by our forefathers. These can be seen in the Athalmer pool room. V. Houghton, Athalmer, is the sole agent for the district.”

“The highway bridge is being built over the Columbia River, along centre line of Sifton Street, Athalmer. The bridge is now taking great shape, there are twelve men working on it, under the direct supervision of David Bale, contractor. It will rest on 100 piles, will be 20 feet wide, 139 feet long and about 300 feet above the bed of the river.”

Jumbo Pass

Jumbo Pass lies on one of the old routes through the Purcells between the East and West Kootenays.

The pass crosses the divide between the valleys of Glacier Creek to the west and the north fork of Toby Creek to the east.

Toby Creek joins the Columbia River at the site of David Thompson's Kootenae House. Its valley seems to have been a prehistoric route through the Purcells. The first recorded travelers over this section of mountains were Shuswap Chief Pierre Kinbasket and tribe who were said to have migrated to the headwaters of the Columbia in the 1840's. Thereafter, Kinbasket is reported not only as a frequent traveler on the trail but also as clearing and building parts of it. He acted as guide to Walter Moberly in the 1860's.

Two valleys only about 10 kilometers apart bring trails from the west to Toby Creek; Hamill Creek via Wells (now Earl Grey) Pass, and Glacier Creek via Jumbo Pass.

1893— Trail building started on Jumbo Pass and exploration up Toby Creek.

1894— The trail was built up Toby Creek and over the summit.

1895— 48 miles of trail was built from the east.

1896— A good cattle trail was completed along Toby and its north fork to Houser (now Duncan) Lake in the West Kootenay.

1898— The trail is shown on the Lands and Works Dept. map of the East and West Kootenays.

Turnbull, assistant to Walter Moberly, examined the pass used by the Indian Kinbasket, leading from Howser (now Duncan) Lake to Toby Creek. This led through Wells (now Earl Grey) Pass, the latter being for many years afterwards the only traversed crossing of the Purcells from Lake Windermere to Kootenay Lake.

(Thorington, 1946)

(Museum Files)

Ray Crooks Legacy

On December 1, 2021, Ray Crook left us with a wealth of Historic Memories. He had been an Historic Society Member for 64 years.

He was born on September 1st, 1918 in Windermere. He was educated in the Windermere School then his family moved to the Kootenay National Park where they developed the Rocky Mountain Cabin Camp which included seven cabins, a gasoline station and a store in the early 1930's. (Selling in 1956.)

In 1957, Ray moved to Invermere where he had built a house along 10th Avenue for his Mother.

He soon became interested in the Local Historic Society which was meeting in people's homes. By 1962 he was on the executive and becoming very active in the groups activities. By 1964, the group decided that they needed a permanent home that the Society could call their own. It was at this time with Ray's assistance a Museum became a reality.

Ray knew of one of the Crook's Cabins that the KNP had been using was now sitting empty. He took on the responsibilities of having the cabin moved to Invermere. He paid for the foundation that was poured on the Southern Rim of the Pot Hole (Village property) across the road from Ian Weir's Garage. (Now AG Foods.) The move took place May 30th, 1964.

From 1964, the Museum Concept grew to what you see today and Ray was active all the way. The Crook's Cabin now known as the Pioneer Cabin continues to be an important part of the Windermere Valley Museum and Archives Complex.

In 1965 the Society was incorporated as an official B.C. Society as it is now known, The Windermere District Historical Society. Ray received a Life Membership in 1987.

Ray continued to be interested in the Museum. He often checked-in to see how "things" were going. He used the archives for his researching and he would add photos to our collection. Today he is still involved with his very generous donation.

THANK YOU RAY

(Compiled by Sandy McKay)