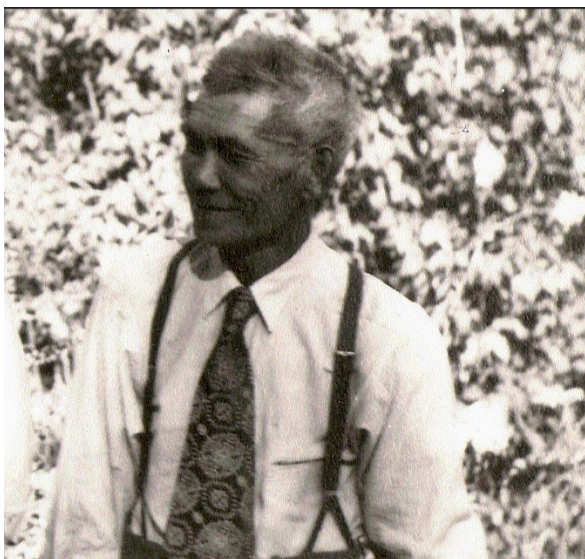


VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A 1K0 May 2022 250-342-9769



Wing Lee

In 1911, Wing Lee ran a laundry, a restaurant and a boarding house in Wilmer, across from the Town Hall, E. M. Taylor Store and next to the Imperial Bank. (Now Mantykas)

A quote from the late Bror Carlson—"Nerves in Wilmer were zapped for awhile after Wing Lee ran all around shooting, helter-skelter, chasing after a pig he wanted to slaughter."

In 1912 he moved his general store to Invermere and ran it there until 1946. He also had rooms for miners and teamsters.

To visit his store was an adventure. It was dark, lit only by two dusty front windows. One window was where Wing displayed his goods, but he didn't change the window very often. Usually his cat, Bacon, slept there under the banana stalk, which was often empty and dusty.

Goods were just kept in boxes piled around, but Wing always seemed to know what box held the customer's request. The housewives of the Village only bought canned or packaged goods there because Wing very seldom changed his clothes or

cleaned the store.

Wing Lee was a character and everyone loved and appreciated his humour. He kept chickens in the backyard for the benefit of customers, and a horse called Jimmy. Over the hill he kept a cow and some pigs.

The store was open day and night. Miners and teamsters hauling ore from the Paradise Mine stayed there and had breakfast. Old timers met there when they came to town.

Wing Lee did not go to bed. In winter he slept in a chair by the potbellied stove and in summer, he slept by the screen door in his kitchen area.

At Christmas time, he gifted each of his customers with candied ginger. He contributed to the community affairs—hospital, education, etc. He never kept books, but always knew what people owed him. All the good and bad boys sold their collected beer bottles to Wing. Sometimes they stole the bottles from Wing's backyard. He paid them in candy. He knew everyone and everyone's children.

The male customers were often interested in the commodity hidden under sacks of potatoes in the back room. The commodity that got Wing Lee in trouble with the law. After the bar, there was always Wings, and one night the law caught up with him. There was a great disturbance and brawl going on outside his place and someone phoned the police and Wing was charged. He appeared the next morning with a white bandage around his head.

He was put in jail for a short time. Wing was concerned about the animals. The policeman opened Wing's cell door and he emerged to wander up the street, unescorted, to feed the chickens, gather eggs, and feed the cow and pigs. Then, filling his pockets with oranges and candy for the policeman's daughter, he wandered back to the police station.

Wing Lee Shopkeeper Inimitable

There are in this world human beings unique unto themselves and Wing Lee is one of them. If there is another store in this world equal to his, I hope I shall not die before I see it.

In midsummer, when opening the door of Wing Lee's emporium you will, if it is not your first visit, leave the door wide open, not because you may want to make a hasty retreat but because the accumulation of odours gathered from month to month, nay, year to year, is more savory mixed with oxygen from the outside world.

Turn first to the window. Last year sometime Wing Lee ordered a variety of men's shoes, most have been sold, but the odd pair is still there, so are the boxes in which the others were packed. Hanging above them is the empty banana stalk from last month's bananas. Flanking them on one side are three tins of tobacco, a man's leather jacket, four tins of peaches, and a medley array of shoe laces, toothbrushes and a box of cigarette lighters. On the other side is a pair of red felt women's bedroom slippers, two boxes of soap, a carton of chewing tobacco, and the piece de resistance, a large round yellow cheese in the middle of which sits Wing Lee's mascot, a rather seedy looking persian cat named Bacon. That is the top layer. What is underneath I couldn't quite make out for the collection of empty boxes and wrapping paper that filled any vacant space.

When you grope your way into the door there is standing room for only three people at once, for a new order of goods has arrived and the cases are laid inside the door. These are pushed back only to make room for the next lot. But ask Wing Lee for any article, and dollars to doughnuts he has it and he can go immediately to its resting place.

The boys go in for chocolate bars and shoe laces and write their own accounts in his book. Wing Lee never renders bills but occasionally will say, "You owe me so and so." And ten to one, he is quite right.

Government auditors take one look at his accounts and bid a hasty leave.

If there is another store anywhere like it, I want to see it.

(Winn Weir Files)

Many old timers today will remember Wing Lee.

In 1946 his store was sold to Rudy Hecher.

In 1960 Murray Fisher opened Valley Foods.

1984 the building sold to Ron, Randy, and Tim Brash and Doug Degrassie- IGA.

In 2003 it was a Saan Store and from 2015 to present, it is Red Apple.

Chinese Pioneers

The first Chinese pioneers to arrive in the Valley came to Wilmer as prospectors and miners around 1864.

A great excitement is raging in this camp regarding new discoveries on several creeks emptying into the Columbia. Numbers leaving daily all the week, not less than 300 men now out there.

Many fabulous stories have been told of the millions that were produced in placer gold from Wild Horse, Findlay and Toby and other streams of the district, but the official records at Victoria account for slightly less than \$1,000,000 of which \$500,000 was recorded between 1864-1865.

Like most placer workings, the production soon tapered off and gradually the white men were replaced by Chinese who were content with smaller earnings. For years thereafter, it is recorded that several hundred Chinese were to be found on Wild Horse, Findlay and Toby Creeks.

They endured the hardships of this life and like their compatriots did not make their fortunes with gold. They served as cooks in the camps and on the ranches before moving on to their own enterprises..... Laundries, stores, restaurants and domestic help.

WE SALUTE THEM

Notary Public Frank Richardson 1906

Mr. Frank Richardson, who was born in England, arrived in Athalmer with the Columbia Logging Company as their Manager/Bookkeeper at the turn of the century.

At that time, dredges kept the river open during the summer months. The river boats, until 1914, brought in settlers, homesteaders and supplies. Athalmer had two stores, two hotels, a church, school, blacksmith and a community hall.

Logs were sent down the river to the Golden office. The last log drive down Toby Creek was in 1912 and in 1913 the old Columbia River Co. was sold.

Frank Richardson stayed on in Athalmer and had been appointed a Notary Public by the Lt. Governor. The Notary Public building, on the museum grounds, was built in Athalmer around the turn of the century and was used by Frank Richardson for many years.

In the 1920's Mr. Richardson had built his general store in Athalmer and often conducted Notary Public business there.

In late 1918, the Pennington family arrived from England to manage the Coronation Hotel. Mr. and Mrs. Pennington had their children with them, F.W. Hillier and Miss Winnie Hillier, children of Mrs. Pennington's first marriage.

In 1926 F.W. Hillier married Miss Annie Frater and in the late 1920's Mr. Frank Richardson married Miss Winnie Hillier.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Richardson built the family home in Athalmer and brought up their children there. Jack and Joan. Joan died at the age of 13 from cancer. A memorial stained glass window is in Christ Church Trinity at this time. The window was done in memory of Joan by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Richardson and her sisters and brother.

The other children, Dorothy, Anne and Jack grew up in Athalmer.

Mr. Richardson died March 11, 1963.

From the Valley Echo— Feb.14,1963

By Frank Richardson

Fifty years ago, (1913), before the railway came through, Athalmer was a fast growing town. The old Columbia River Lumber Co. had sold to the largest timber outfit in Vancouver which was controlled by Americans. As headquarters for the Golden mill and office, Athalmer was the supply depot and office for the logging operations which were greatly extended for this upper country.

The company had an office, three large warehouses and a set of stables lining the riverbanks. There were three logging camps with 75 men each, Milligan's, A. White and J. Hostler. Joe Hanna was Walking Boss.

All supplies came up the Columbia by steamboat in the spring and summer and the camps were supplied by four horse teams coming in daily bringing hay, oats and groceries.

In the spring when the water rose in the creeks, logs from the camps on Horsethief and Toby were dumped in and were driven down to the Columbia to the mill at Golden. The steamboats were operated by Captain Armstrong at first, then by Captain Alex Blakley and then by Captain John Blakley. Everyone looked forward to hearing the old steamboat round the bend giving a signal to open the bridge which was equipped with the necessary machinery.

There was a general store at Athalmer, Lake & Co., one harness maker, three livery stables, three hotels, a poolroom and barbershop, a jewelry store and a number of residents. The Bank of Montreal located here soon after the new management took over, and the Imperial was also here.

There were lots of convivial evenings at the Coronation Hotel and the haunting strains of "Sweet Adeline" and "In the Evening by the Moonlight" drifted through the doorway. There was a good mixed party and one or two good tenors and a baritone. When that floated out the marble doorway, you could forget Georgina Davis and Madame Patti.

You found your way around with a stable lantern as lights were scarce. Sometimes some of the adventurous ladies took a walk past the Coronation and the boys chased them. When they got away from the light they stopped running.

A football field was cleared and sports were held there. This was on what is now Warner's Lumber Yard. (Rona. North Star Lumber.) Lumber company teams pulled out the roots and bank boys and others did the work.

On the hill was Canterbury (now Invermere) and an excellent place to exercise our horses. Races were held there once a year. On the advent of the land company, Irrigated Fruit Lands, the spot was promoted to Invermere.

A very fine rink was built with room for three curling rinks and hockey matches. Between Athalmer and Invermere there were well fought battles. There were lots of dances in the schoolhouse where we had a great time. That is the place for a real old square dance and it was done to the King's taste.

During the summer a government dredge worked on the river and with the steamboats working their way over the sandbars at low water kept the river open and in good shape.

The butcher shop and the company root houses were on the river bank. The first car that came to the country belonged to the secretary of the lumber company. A two-cylinder affair, it could not make the hill and had to be pushed up. In 1914 the railroad came through. The first world war came and a lot of the boys joined up.

The old days are gone forever. Too bad we will not see them again.

Delphine Mine

(originally Eureka)

The Eureka claim was staked by Baptiste Morigeau in 1897, prospecting up Horsethief Creek.

Baptiste Morigeau sold the claim for \$500.00 and the owner let the claim run out in 1898.

The claim was re-staked by George Stark, Wilmer. Re-named the Delphine, in honor of his wife. Mr. Stark also named Delphine Creek, Delphine Basin, Delphine Glacier and Delphine Mountain after his wife.

August 1898— Mr. Stark and crew started work on the claim.

1899— R.R. Bruce acquired the Delphine as per

his agreement with Osler and Hammond, mining brokers of Toronto, Winnipeg and he agreed to be agent for H.H. Hammond in 1898.

In November 1899, there was a crew of twelve men on Delphine payroll, with W.P. Beatty as foreman.

1899-1900 there were shipments of galena ore made. Fifty to sixty ounces of silver a ton, sixty to seventy per cent lead. Location was described as "Delphine Mine was situated on the north side of North Fork of Toby Creek, about one half way to the summit from wagon road in the Valley."

1900— Jack Barbour and Joe Leveque rawhided ore from Delphine and packed in supplies.

1910- Mine is dormant.

(Museum Files)

Museum Update

When is the Museum open?

May— Saturdays 10-4

June— Tuesday thru Saturday- 10-4
(closed Sunday/Monday)

July/August/September— Thursday-
Monday- 10-4 (closed Tuesday/Wednesday)

Tours are being offered

Saturday, May 28-10 am.

The same tour is offered again on

Tuesday June 14-10:30 a.m.

Register with the curator—250-342-9769

Wanting to do Research?

You need to make an appointment. Members are free but you still need an appointment.

Phone museum curator:

JD Jeffery 250-342-9769

or

Marg Christensen 250-342-9434

There is a fee: \$15.00-1/2 hour.

Photocopying- .25

(Compiled by Sandy McKay)