

# VALLEY HISTORY

## AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 342-9769 August 2003



### The Frater Family

By Jessie ( Frater ) Lockhart  
February 1997

The Frater and Stewart families were Lowlanders, Scots who settled in the rich agricultural country of the Lothians and the quiet villages of the County of Edinburgh in the early 1800's. Situated near Mewtron-Dalkeith, was a large tract of land called "Mellerhill". It was agricultural land to produce food for the people of Scotland. Six stone cottages called "Brunstone" housed the workers. Two brothers, Robert and John Frater settled in this area.

Thomas Melrose Frater ( born 1883) married Isabella Hall ( born 1880) on July 1st 1904 in Edinburgh and they lived at Leith. ( pictured above ) Children Annie Isabella and Jessie were born there. Two children died in infancy.

Jessie Simpson Frater ( born 1872) married William Stewart ( born 1869 ) in 1895. William Stewart was employed at Mellerhill and they lived in one of the Brunstone Cottages.

The Tom Frater and William Stewart Families emigrated to Canada together. They sailed on the "Empress of Ireland" April 1913. They arrived in Golden May 2nd and were destined for the Windermere Valley. On the riverboat they met the Walker Family. Jack Walker told me that I was a cranky baby and he was often told to look after me! They must have been glad of each others company after the voyage, then the railway across Canada and now the

riverboat.

I suppose the reasons for deciding to emigrate were much the same as the influx of settlers of 1910-11-12 ..... the brochures with glowing stories of the new land, the beauty, the advantages, being circulated by the CVI Co. and the CPR. Lots were being sold on the Toby Creek Benches.

Lots 51,52,and 53 were sold to James Sinclair, a wealthy lawyer from Edinburgh in 1911. The Sinclair's were never considered to be true pioneers, as everything had to be finished by the time the family arrived. No hardships for Mrs. Sinclair!!

My father was a carpenter in Scotland and I think he had some contract of arrangement with Mr. Sinclair because the Frater Family immediately went to live on the Sinclair Farm on arrival in the Valley in 1913. However, in early 1914 they moved into Invermere and rented one of the Contracting Co. Cottages situated kitty-corner to Wing Lee's Store.

Annie was born in Scotland in 1905. Jessie was born in Scotland in 1912. Brother Jim was born October 17, 1914- The first baby born in the Windermere District Hospital in Invermere. Mary Hall Frater was born in 1917 and Stanley in 1920.

In 1919 the pioneer Howell Family moved and Mother and Dad bought their house and the property had room for a big garden. This is the property owned by Jim and Kay Frater now. At the time of the sale, and for many years, the house was at the back of the property with the garden in front.

Mother and Dad must have been overjoyed to find a St. Andrew's Society already formed in the district. Randolph Bruce was president and St. Andrews Night dinners and dancing were held. The first one we all attended was held in Wilmer, in a hall above a store/home. I remember the excitement of the family getting ready to go. I was banned to a dark bedroom all afternoon with my hair in rag curlers. The trip over to Wilmer was by horse and sleigh.

We always went up to Aunt Jessie and Uncle Bill Stewart's for Christmas Dinner, for fun and visiting. We all walked up together, Dad carrying the youngest. Dad sang on the way up .... But louder on the way home !! Uncle Bill and Dad had a few merry Christmas drinks.

Our Dad loved "Hogmanay ". It was a New years party and New Years Day, a tall dark man.... the first-footer.... carrying a gift, was supposed to bring good luck to the household for the year. Our house had to be shiny clean for New Years Day. Aunt Jessie and Uncle Bill came down for the traditional Hogmanay dinner.

All the settlers brought their treasures to the New Land. Ours were shipped in a brownish-red metal trunk with white painted:

### **T.M.FRATER- SETTLERS EFFECTS**

That trunk was a fixture in the home and I think Jim and Kay still have it.

Mother was always busy with community groups- Hospital Ladies Aid, Church Ladies Aid, Red Cross, Girl Guide Mothers Group. She was also busy looking after the garden. She loved lots of flowers . We grew up with the old Scottish sayings.... ' Waste not want not' , 'A penny saved is a penny earned' , ' A stitch in time saves nine', 'Idle hands cause mischief' and ' Honest work hurts no one'.

Father was always fun-loving, sociable, kind and calm. He loved the Scottish songs. One day he was supposed to be working in the vegetable garden but there he was standing looking at the lake and mountains singing at the top of his voice " The Bonnie, Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond." Mother would give him a shove and say " Come on now, Tom, that will never feed the bairns."

I appreciated my Scottish roots when in 1973 Bill and I visited Scotland. Cousin Esther was our tour guide and gave me a lot of history as we went about. We had tea in Brunstone Cottage #1 where the Fraters and Stewarts had their 'Going away' party. A lovely stone church there has the Frater name still on the front right hand pew. This church had a grave yard and there was a tall gray memorial stone with every Frater name engraved- even our Father's: **Thomas Melrose Frater**

**Canada, 1933**

## Valley News December 1945

Sale of 'West Firlands' property of the late H.E. Forster, north of Wilmer to T.W. Appleby, a recent settler in the Valley, has occasioned much interest as the property is a district landmark. 'West Firlands 'comprise 4300 acres which Mr. Appleby plans to develop into a dude ranch starting in the spring. He also plans to stock the land with Hereford cattle.

Sale of the property caused old-timers to reminisce for the history of the land is wound up with tales of pioneer days. It all started back in 1894 when Capt. Jim Gordon and his brother Hugh, of Nairn, Scotland homesteaded there. Later they were joined by another brother Pat. John and James Lambert built the house in 1896 and that same year Capt. Gordon went to Montana to get sheep and trailed them in. The trip took months as there were no roads and no bridges over the rivers.

When the South African war broke out , Capt. Gordon was recalled to his regiment and then H.E. Forster took over both the property and the sheep. Mr. Forster had come from Kamloops at that time, although he was brought up in Hamilton and had been educated at Eton. When he came from Kamloops he brought with him his steamboat, the " Selkirk" and ran it up and down the Columbia with a three man crew.

In the Fall of 1899 , Forster sold the sheep to Malcolm McGuinness of Ft. Steele and they were driven there from the Forster Ranch by three old-timers, Joe Leveque, Joe Legacie and Louis Belgium. Five hundred sheep at a time were taken on scows up the Columbia, crossing the river just opposite Sinclair. Then Forster switched to cattle and made Alexander Ritchie, then from Calgary, his foreman. In addition to the extensive grazing land on the property, 4000 acres were rented from the provincial government to provide pasture for the five hundred head of cattle. Forster also always had 25 to 30 saddle horses.

The house "West Firlands" was commodious, having 14 rooms including a fine library stocked with valuable books. The entire house was handsomely furnished and when the building burnt to the ground in October 1940, many valuable fur-

nishings were destroyed.

Forster, who was a mechanical and electrical engineer, planned an extensive irrigation scheme for the property. In 1901 a dam was built on No. 2 Creek just above the Falls. The log dam was 80 feet high and a rock tunnel 400 feet in length was built to connect with the dam. Fred Aylmer, later Lord Aylmer, after whom the village of Athalmer is named, was the engineer in charge of the construction, and David Bales, well known government bridge builder of that time built the dam under Aylmer's direction.

The dam was just completed and water started through the tunnel when the structure collapsed. This was a cruel blow to Mr. Forster who had built high hopes on the success of the project. The dam was not rebuilt, a series of irrigation ditches being tried instead.

Of later years, Mr. Forster's activities on the Ranch lessened and his tragic murder in 1940 brought an end to the colorful history of the property.

( Museum Archives )

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## Banking and the Old Athalmer House ( By D. Charles Howell )

Our Family settled in Invermere in May 1912 and that autumn I did most of the lathing on the new McKay house. ( Now Lakeside Inn ). In 1913 I clerked in the Pitts and Hankey Store and Post Office in Invermere and then had no particular interest in banks and banking. I opened a personal account in Imperial Bank of Canada at Invermere in 1912 and I made some Bank deposits for Pitts and Hankey in 1913.

I joined the staff of the Imperial Bank of Canada in Invermere and Wilmer on January 2nd, 1914. In September 1914 the Wilmer branch was closed and a new branch opened at Athalmer at that time. It was located in a lean-to section of the Peake Hardware Store on the West side of the street from the then river wharf north of the old Columbia River bridge.

Near to the old bridge and between the street and the river was a log building with a verandah facing the river and was used as living quarters for

the staff of the Bank of Montreal so I can very well assume this was the building sold to the Bank by Ray Crook's father— Charles Crook.

( Jessie Lockhart Files)

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## Wilmer— As I Saw It Fifty Years Ago ( by Miss Effie Turnor-February 28, 1963 )

Wilmer, 50 years ago, to me was a fascinating place. There were the hawthorn bushes along Wilmer Creek, just down behind where the Seatons now live, that had fat, juicy berries which we used to eat on the way home from school. There were all the tiny springs in the bank, further down the creek. If a small hole was dug, the water gushed out. To have one's very own spring was a marvel.

I remember Mrs. Ball, who was such a wonderful hostess. The Ladies' Aid was always sure of an extra special tea when they met at F.W.Ball's house. No one ever came away empty-handed. If it wasn't fresh eggs, it was a bowl of raspberries, or some other fruit or vegetables. The same applied to Mrs. George Rice, who taught my mother how to make her own yeast and bake bread.

One fall, some of the ladies invited mother to go up to Mrs. Barbour's, on the mine road, to pick crab-apples and Oregon grapes, with the result we had some delicious jellies.

In those days we had to go down a zigzag trail from the Benches to Wilmer, which was very slippery in winter. It was easy to go down, but try to get up! Usually we all landed in a heap at the bottom of a small gully, laughing so hard we couldn't get up, Mother and Dad included. Sometimes Mrs. Peter Murray, a prim Scottish lady, came out to see what we were doing. We used to sleigh-ride in front of the courthouse. We even poured a few buckets of water down the hill one evening, which made it wonderful for us, but not for those who had to attend court— they couldn't get up there next morning.

The Anglican minister, Mr. Colquhon, and Mr. Wedderburn, the Presbyterian minister, came alternate months. Mother played the organ for both of them. Once, when we first arrived in Wilmer, and lived in Mr. Bruce's settler's bunkhouse, we came

back from church to find someone else in the bunkhouse and they had left the door open and Mrs. Palmer's dog had taken our roast of meat off the oven door and was just finishing it as we passed the Palmer house.

The George Starkes lived in the little log house by the water tower. In those days, there was a lovely garden with a little latticed summer house in the southeast corner.

( Museum Files )

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**While on a visit to Mr. Hardwick Grainger, of Canal Flats, B.C.,** ( by B.G.Hamilton) on the 12th of October 1914, he told me the following which we further investigated .

“ During the winter of 1911-12 while the Provincial Government were constructing the present bridge at Canal Flats across the Kootenay River a gang was at work gathering up stone for the weighting of the bridge piers from the float at the foot of the rocky point where the Valley of the Kootenay River joins that of the Columbia River, just a little to the East of the present road leading up the East side of Columbia Lake. They had constructed a short cut off the float and there was a big rock in the way of completion which had tumbled down from the rock cliff. The rock must have weighed fifteen or twenty tons. In order to get to the float, Jim Smith, who was in charge , put several charges of powder into the rock and blew it up. I was there at the time and when the rock had been blasted, we found underneath it the skeletons of two men. They were embedded about three feet into the earth and from all appearances would judge that at one time they must have been lying on the ground and the rock come down on top of them. Beside them were the following: one hand saw with handle all rotted away, some drills, an auger, and a heavy hammer. There was no evidence of tent or clothing of any description. No cooking utensils or anything else were discovered. The implements and the skulls were removed. For most of two years the skulls were allowed to remain on a stump at the side of the Kootenay River Bridge. The tools or implements were distributed about and the other bones just took their own way. No investigation or elaborate examination that I have ever heard was ever made to determine whose skeletons these two could be or how they came by

their death. The supposition is that they were lying there and the rock simply came down on top of them.”

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## Museum Update

( submitted )

Elderhostel continues to be a big hit at the Museum with six visits this summer. Our Curator, Dorothy Blunden, does a great job of entertaining the group with Valley historical facts using hats.

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Our summer staff are Thea Jardine and Meaghan Muir. They are doing an excellent job of greeting our guests and keeping the museum clean.

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On July 18th, 2003, many surveyors were at the museum using antique surveying equipment, prior to the unveiling of the David Thompson /Charlotte Small statue which was a huge success. Starting with a parade from the museum led by Sandy McKay on horseback, carrying the Hudson Bay flag , followed by the R.C.M.P., Bagpipers, Legion Members carrying flags, and many pioneer family members riding in a horse drawn wagon or in the old Cleland Lincoln. The unveiling was followed by a banquet at the Radium Resort with Jack Nisbet as the guest speaker.

The Statue committee of Dorothy Blunden, Fran Jeffery, Jessie Lockhart, Cam Berry, Jaryl McIsaac, Marg Christensen, Eileen Fiell and Jerry Backmeyer thank the membership for all their support.

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Does anyone know who left the baby buggy on the deck at the museum?