

VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A 1K0 342-9769 August 2004



CELINA AND RUFUS KIMPTON

Rufus Ashton Kimpton was born June 17, 1860 in South Roxton, Quebec. The eldest of the 6 children of Marshall and Debra. Rufus left home at the age of 16 and began his life of adventure. Over the next 7 years he was everything from a bellboy in St. Louis to a hotel manager in a town in Louisiana. He joined a land investigating party in Tennessee for a time. Later, when he tried to enter Cuba he was turned back because of the yellow fever. He returned to Quebec and then was away again with the C.P.R. construction in the west.

Rufus arrived in the frontier town of Calgary early in 1883. For a time he worked as clerk and general handyman at the Royal Hotel. It was during this period that Rufe established one of the first breweries in Calgary. He was soon selling beer to the C.P.R. construction gangs at \$3.50 a dozen. It was a one man operation and a great moneymaker! Following the C.P.R., Rufus expanded into Holt City (Lake Louise) and set up another successful brewery in a small cabin. Using some of his profits he began roaming again. Looking for a place to settle down he went

west to Revelstoke and then took a pack train down through Missoula, Montana and the Tobacco Plains.

He finally decided on Donald, B.C. which was by then a divisional point on the C.P.R. In partnership with J.C. Steen, Rufe soon owned a store and a hotel in Donald. He also had a string of trading posts through the Kootenays. Donald was a bustling town in 1885 and money was plentiful. There were 2,000 C.P.R. men working near Donald and because Calgary was dry, bootlegging was the order of the day.

Celina Margaret Behan was born in Philadelphia, Pa., U.S.A. on January 29, 1864, the second eldest of 11 children. The Behans moved first to Pembroke, Ontario and then to Winnipeg, Manitoba where Celina's parents, James and Alice Mary operated a store. Celina arrived in Donald, B.C., in 1886. Here she met and married Rufus Kimpton on February 26, 1889. Two children were born to Rufe and Celina— Clifford Ashton on January 2, 1890 and Vaughan Stanley on June 20, 1891. Both were christened in St. Peter's Church.

In 1897 the C.P.R. announced that division headquarters would be moved to Revelstoke. In fairness to the townspeople the C.P.R. offered to move the buildings. Besides his holdings in Donald, Rufe had a store at Golden and a stage line south from there. He also had a trading post and a ranch at Windermere and this is where he decided to move. By 1899, Rufe, Celina and their two sons had taken up residence in Windermere. With them came the "White House" which Rufe had built in Donald after his marriage. Unfortunately (or fortunately) there was no church in Windermere. Rufe returned to Donald and shortly after, with the help of his C.P.R. friends and Captain Armstrong, a small wooden church appeared on a hill over-

looking Lake Windermere. Thus St. Peter's became known as "The Stolen Church" and Rufus Kimpton became known as "the man who stole a church."

For the next 35 years, Rufe and Celina became deeply involved with their chosen community. Besides being proprietor of the "White House" Rufe was, for a time, in partnership in a store with his brother-in-law J.C. Pitts. Celina played the organ at St. Peter's and at any other church where she was needed. She was concerned at all times with fund raising activities for St. Peters. These included teas, musical evenings, plays, ice cream sales, and dances. Both worked diligently on behalf of the school. Rufus had a remarkable memory and delighted in telling stories of the early days of the west. Rufe died at the White House in Windermere, B.C. on June 2, 1934. For the next two years Celina ran the hotel on her own.

(submitted by: Fran Kimpton- Sept. 1984)

The Columbia

(Tuesday, August 8, 1911)

The Wilmer water-works is fast nearing completion under the supervision of Mr. Larrabee. It is expected that the work will be completed not later than August 15. The estimated cost of the water system will be in the vicinity of \$3,000.00 .

Mount Swansea, on the east side of the Valley is 5,655 feet elevation. It once had a copper mine on it and the copper was sent to Swansea, Wales to be concentrated. Hence the name. The mountain can be climbed easily. A road goes most of the way up.

MUSEUM FILES

The day set for the first Court ever held by a Judge in the town-site of Invermere was the **18th of January, 1916.**

For at least sixteen days previously the temperature of the outside world had been extremely cold. The Judge was a man past middle age and fond of his personal comforts; he invariably lodged at the Invermere Hotel while in this part and here he was again to be found. The hotel was kept by George Starke, a pioneer of the pioneers and it was certainly warm and comfortable. The ordinary place for the holding of court was at Wilmer three and a half miles hence. No automobiles were in operation at the time. The Judge looked out from the window of his hotel upon the cold air and the snow clad earth below. Then he said " We'll hold court right here in this warm hotel. No slow drives in this outside temperature for me." The sitting room of the Hotel was converted into a court-room.

The first case was the shooting of a bull. Ritchie versus Houlgrave. A legal fight full of interests to those engaged in the cattle industry or those living upon the range where the cattle prowled about. Ritchie charged Captain Houlgrave with shooting his range bull while with his herd and Captain Houlgrave pleaded self defense saying that he shot the bull at three hundred yards range while the animal was making a vicious charge at him.

From every part of the community were summoned witnesses to testify and those who were not witnesses were cattle men on the watch. Never before the two days of the case had the hotel done so much business at that period of the year.

The proprietor is credited with saying that it would be worth fifty dollars for him to pay a man to go out and shoot another bull in defense.

Because of high emotions in the court-room, the case was set for another date.

THE LEGEND OF THE LOST LEMON DIGGINGS 1927

Twenty four sun-bleached skeletons huddled together in ghastly confusion constitute a mecca for B.C. gold seekers. They lie in the sunny forest glade somewhere in the vicinity of Findlay Creek.

For nearly half a century (as of 1927) the few familiar with the legend of the Lost Lemon Diggings have made many attempts to locate the grisly landmark and solve the mystery.

In the late 1870's, Canal Flats was the rendezvous of hundreds of miners stampeding to the Columbia Valley gold fields. It was the site of one of the most bustling gold camps on the continent. The story of the memorable strike varies in details as the farmers at Canal Flats tell it. The essential facts are so similar in every instance that the story rings true. No-one in the 'Flats doubts it at all.

As the story goes, it was first found by a lone miner in 1882. This is at the time when the canal was in operation and prospectors from all parts of the U.S. were pouring into 'Grohman', as Canal Flats was known. They came by steamboat from Bonners Ferry or by horse and pack train. In spite of his attempted secrecy, news of his strike leaked out and created a sensation phenomenal even in those days when good strikes were being made every day. One secret he guarded closely, though, and that was the location of the claim. While his grub stake lasted he worked the claim but was eventually forced to return to civilization for food. When he returned to Canal Flats he had slung over his body every kind of container filled with coarse gold. Even his spare socks and moccasins were slung to his belt and filled with gold. The strike was reported to be so rich that he needed help

to work it and many were the offers of partnership that he received and rejected.

By the earliest possible boat, four families arrived from the south, presumed to be relatives. Contrary to the usual custom of miners, wives and children were included in the party, making 24 persons in all. Armed with equipment and provisions for many months, they made for the Lemon Diggings, believed to be in the vicinity of Findlay Creek.

Travel in the direction of the mine was a hard task for men with heavy loads but with the help of the women and children, it was possible for the party to commence operations and remain at the diggings for 2 or 3 months. When nothing more was heard from them, fears were aroused.

Search parties were organized and for 2 months every man available was out looking. After that their fate was accepted and interest waned. With the 24 assumed dead, speculation was rife as to the richness of the claim.

Ten years later, it was found only to be lost again. An exhausted miner, ill with fatigue arrived at Canal Flats. His shoes were gone and his clothes were torn to shreds. The soles of his feet were lacerated. With him he had 2 glass jars filled with gold dust. Upon his arrival he collapsed.

For several days he lingered. In a high fever he rambled in his talk. In his mutterings " Lost Lemon Diggings" was heard, and excitement was high among the settlers. For days the prospector lapsed into unconsciousness. Recovering at times he repeated " Lost Lemon Diggings."

They waited patiently for him to tell his story. By an agreement among the settlers and miners, one old prospector was chosen to sit by his bedside to secure from him the location of the gold.

In 5 or 6 days he showed a slight improvement. In answer to questions he nodded his head. When asked if he had found the Diggings, a look of horror came into his

(Continued on page 4)

eyes and he would talk no more.

The day he died, the sick man told parts of his story.

“ I have discovered the “Lost Lemon Diggings. They are dead.” His mind appeared to be somewhere else and the look of horror was in his eyes again. In halting words he revealed the grim tragedy. A heap of sun bleached skeletons told the story. How they met their death he could not tell. They had died huddled together. It was speculated that hunger had overtaken them but the lust for gold drove them on.

The old prospector died without revealing the location !!

(Jaryl McIsaac Files)

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Within 2-7 miles of Wilmer, B.C.

Ed Rauch, Wilmer, B.C.

October 1911

Golden Star

February 16, 1934

The packers from Butte Montana have called for another consignment of range Cayuses and the riders are busy gathering in as many as possible so as to be able to ship out on next week's Kootenay Central train going south. These are canned for the French market where there is a good demand for this class of canned meat. It brings ready cash to the local people and employment to the younger riders.

(Museum Files)

Charles Warren

“ I came into the East Kootenay from Oshawa, Ontario to go into the ranching business with Charles Law, from the same place. We shipped a car of pure bred animals through from Ontario to Golden. This included cattle, chickens and dogs . I arrived there on 24th of May 1886 and with the assistance of Ed Te-gart, drove them up the trail to what was then ‘Salmon Beds’ where Athalmer now stands.

I went back to the East again and came out with a stock of merchandise for a store in 1887. They were just finishing a steamer to run upon the river. I waited at Golden ten days for its completion but at the end of that time I loaded much of my stuff on a canoe and headed upstream. My guide proved to be a bad one, not knowing the route and getting under the influence of liquor. Between all we were 10 more days in making the journey or 20 in all from my arrival in Golden to arrival home. I quit the partnership arrangement at the end of one year and sold the business in Golden to Thomas King in February 1925. ”

(B.G.Hamilton Files - 1925)

THANK-YOU DENNIS WILLIAMSON FOR THE HISTORY OF YOUR FAMILY IN THE VALLEY. WE APPRECIATE ADDING THIS INFORMATION TO OUR FILES.

PLEASE LOOK TO FUTURE ISSUES FOR THE WILLIAMSON'S STORY IN WILMER, B.C., WRITTEN BY THE GRANDSON OF GEORGE AND DELPHINE STARKE, DENNIS WILLIAMSON.

WE ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO WRITE THEIR FAMILY HISTORY FOR THE MUSEUM FILES AND FUTURE MUSEUM NEWSLETTERS.

Thank-you to the volunteer receptionists that kept the museum open in June. (week-days from 1-4 , Peter and Jean Vallenge, Olga Redhead, Fran Jeffery, Dorothy Blunden and Marg Christensen.

Our Summer Staff is Melissa Doenz. She started on June 29th working a 40 hour week with Sunday and Monday off. She has been attending the University of Lethbridge where she will be continuing her studies in Education.

New additions to the Pioneer Garden are a Thornton Columbine, McKay Tiger-lilies and a Barbour White Lilac.

A big Thank-you to Winderberry Nursery and Joy Bond for the beautiful flowers at the entrance to the Museum.

(compiled by- Sandy McKay)