

# VALLEY HISTORY

## AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A 1K0 342-9769 MAY 2006



### RONACHER FAMILY

In 1927, Catherine and Simon Ronacher and son John arrived from Austria. They settled on the old Alex Robb Farm at the base of Mount Swansea..... the original Tegart Ranch in Windermere.

Simon had one truck and hauled ties for Roy Staples and Pat McGrath. In 1929, Ronacher purchased the Morland Place which had acres of orchards, gardens and livestock to raise. Simon butchered 1 beef and 1 pork every week. Every 2 weeks he butchered 1 beef for the logging camps. By 1931, Simon Ronacher owned 3 trucks and had a tie mill at the Paddy Ryan Lakes area. In 1935 the Ronachers purchased land in Athalmer and in the 1940's he sold the Morland Place to Les Oulton. Here he built the first planer and sawmill. Rudy Hecker was the blacksmith and John Kroepfl and Jack Solinger worked there as well. Simon operated the sawmill in Athalmer until 1938 when he began operating with portable bush mills, hauling the sawn lumber to be finished at the planer. This continued until 1958 when Simon and son John built a new, large

mill at the same site .....( part of which is the Ministry of Highways and Industrial Park in Athalmer. 2006)

In 1940 the Ronachers purchased the Coronation Hotel ( the Tin House ) where beer was sold for \$. 10 a glass and an entire meal for \$. 75. A popular place where the sawmill and planer crews socialized after a long hard day. The Coronation was always busy. Truckers met there before returning to the portable mills in the bush. It was a home away from home!

In 1935 Simon Ronacher's bush camps included : Paddy Ryan Lake camp, a camp on the west side of Columbia Lake, 1938- moved to Goldie Creek and changed over to a portable mill . 1937- There was a camp at Steamboat Mountain ( The Old Rauch Homestead ) and one at Boulder and Law Creeks. 1952- Forster Creek Mill ( #2 Creek ). 1956- Francis Creek Mill.( # 3 Creek ). There was a lumber camp in Jumbo and mills in Shuswap Creek and Brewer Creek with no camps. John Ronacher built the road up Brewer Creek by himself and he built the road to Jumbo Creek with Chris Ronning. 1958- Unloading logs at Athalmer. They sold the sawmill and planer in May 1967 to Revelstoke Sawmill.

Mr. Palmason arrived in Athalmer in 1939 from Manitoba. He came to join friend Jack Solinger and to be a planer-man at the Ronacher Mill. Mrs. Palmason and children arrived in 1940. Laura Palmason was 15 years old when the family arrived in the Valley. John Ronacher was at the station to meet the family. Six years later Laura and John were married and put in charge of the Forester Creek Bush Camp.

**Memoirs of William James McKay  
( 1902-1966 )**

The bush camp had about 25-30 people employed .There was a bunkhouse for the single men and log houses for the married couples.( The lumber was supplied by Ronacher.) Among the folks that were there at the time was Rose and Hugo Olson and the Uchidas. Laura Ronacher was the camp clerk. She supervised the cook-house and ordered all the supplies. Mr. Mitchell and Lim Man You were among the cooks.

“ They were very good cooks and they were very clean.”

Keeping the food was not easy- especially the meat and milk. So..... John built a cooler on top of the cool, creek water. He fastened it down with logs, lumber and rocks! Of course there were bears around all the time so John had to check the food cooler on a regular basis, usually every evening. This was done by making a great noise on the trail all the way to the creek. If bears were present, John had to scare them off-sometimes having to use his gun.

One evening Laura had to call her brother Norman to get her to the hospital quickly . She was staying with her mother in town and son Johnny was about to be born! John Sr. learned of the happy event the next day from Mrs. Catherine Ronacher. Laura and John lived in the bush camps until after the birth of their daughter, Frankie.

**Life in a Bush Camp-Bears to Birth  
By -Laura Ronacher**

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Our Friends and fellow Museum members , Rick and Helen Tamasi, now own part of Ronachers Ranch at the foot of Swansea. Their property includes the old house .

I, William J. McKay am writing this memoir, and my first recollections were living in a large log farmhouse on the Sinclair Farm. I still have faint recollections of the carpenters building the new frame farmhouse in 1906-07. This new house was very large and was a landmark, the finest home in the Valley and for many years. To this date it is still standing and in excellent repair. I went through the house in 1965 accompanied by my mother who was then 87 years of age. ( House still in good condition-2006 ).

From the Ranch there was a trail to Radium Hot Springs, a distance of about three miles. The trail started from the Ranch then onto the bench east of the Wagon Road and above Sinclair Canyon on the north side, then down to the Hot Springs. The pool at the Hot Springs was about 6 feet wide, 12 feet in length and 2 1/2 feet in the deepest part. There was a log cabin 6 feet by ten feet up stream from the pool. We often visited the Springs. Sometimes with saddle horses and other times we would walk in from the Ranch.

While living on the Ranch and attending school in Wilmer, my father or one of his farm hands would drive us to Wilmer on Monday morning and generally pick us up on Friday afternoon for a return trip to the Ranch. This would be by buggy or sleigh, depending on the season.

Summer there was the hay fields and the extra help during harvest. During the summer one could see the steam boats going up and down the Columbia River from the farmhouse at Sinclair Ranch. These boats carried passengers and freight between Golden and the Windermere Lake.

Fall would be hunting but most of all fishing for ling in the back channel. Wes Dawson was the foreman on the lower Ranch at Luxor and they had only the two

girls then, Gladys and Katherine. Other employees whose names I can remember are: Teddy Hearn, Jack McClusky, Clous Hollie , and Scotty Mason.

On winter weekends Harold McKay ( my brother ) and I trapped over 400 muskrats on the sloughs just below the Sinclair Ranch. We gave mother 80 skins for a 'rat coat' and the balance we sold for 15 cents each.

During the fall, winter and spring, all transportation , wagons, buggies and saddle horse was along the Wagon Road. Four and six horse trains, pulling big wagons or sleighs, hauled winter freight from Golden. They would drive along at a good clip and at the end of 25 or 30 miles another team would be waiting and in a few minutes the mail would be on the move. Passengers were also carried on the Mail Stages. Frank Nicholson ( Swede Kid) drove from Golden to Windermere and Vaughan Kimpton drove the stage from Windermere to Cranbrook.

Duncan Yule managed the East Firlands Farm situated at the mouth of Sinclair Creek.

Bill Thompson had a small farm on the west side of the Columbia River opposite Firlands.

Harold E. Forester was on No.2 Creek and ran a large herd of cattle.

Harry Munson had a stopping place located where the town of Edgewater is located. Harry married Emma, my mother's hired maid. Emma came to the Ranch direct from Ireland to work. She was only with us for a short time when they were married and moved to Wilmer where they lived for many years.

Bill Palmer was ranching on land near the mouth of Stoddart Creek.

Jim Lambert and Felix Larabee had farms on the north side of Shuswap Creek.

Jack McCulloch and Bill Morepath had a small Ranch and stopping house on Sinclair Creek just above the Wagon Road.

*( Submitted by Jock McKay )*

## **ROYAL ANTLER RANCH**

Captain R.S.G. Thorold homesteaded 2000 acres in 1887 and in 1904 purchased 29.76 acres of Lot 4596 from C.P.R. Land Department. He established the " Royal Antler Ranch" , situated 21 miles southwest of Invermere, at the confluence of Brewer Creek and Dutch Creek.

Captain Thorold, in a letter written to J. S. Dennis in 1909, says " I am engaged in raising horses and have a thoroughbred stallion which I got from Australia last year . I hope to breed polo ponies from native mares of this country. There is capital bear, deer, sheep and goats etc. Good hunting."

In 1904 T. Thorold was also at the Royal Antler Ranch. Captain Thorold, Jim Johnston ( Comfort Ranch), Ed Johnston ( Sunshine Ranch ), and Ellis and Stoddart ( K-2 ) were all friends and neighbors. Trails linked all these ranches in the early days.

During World War 1 Captain Thorold was called back into service in England. He did not return to Canada. The ranch was put up for sale and finally went into Captain Thorold's estate.

In 1923 Dr. Hawke picked up the Ranch out of the Estate. Dr. and Mrs. Hawke ranched until 1938 when they sold to D. Buckner of Dutch Creek in 1939. Frank Klassen worked on the Ranch.

Dave Michaels bought the Ranch in 1940 and continued with Guiding and Outfitting until 1952. Harry Harbison looked after the Ranch and was a guide also.

In 1957 David R. Williams Jr. then of Calgary, purchased the Ranch. He later resided in the United States.

The watershed of Dutch Creek and Brewer Creek forms a hunting zone of approximately 3000 square acres, and is closely associated with the Royal Antler. During the years 1938-1957 the ranch operated as a guest ranch with

accommodations for hunting and fishing parties. The managers during this time were all big game guides, Frank Richter, Lioel Thompson, Hans Gierlich and Jack Nichol. A string of about 75 pack and saddle horses were used . Good meals were provided. In 1965 Williams appointed Bruce Nichol manager of the Ranch. From this time, it was classed as a 'working ranch' . Horses and cattle were sold and horses for guides Dix Anderson and Bill Dubois, were boarded.

## THE LITTLE ANTLER

The Little Antler Ranch is situated approximately 3 miles south of Invermere on the West Side Road. The first owners, Alexander Ritchie and James Duncan, formed a partnership in 1919 and bought this property. Alexander Ritchie was owner of Swansea Ranch, part owner of Ritchie's Point and he had 2 lots in Windermere. James Duncan was public works foreman. He married Grace Newell ( sister of Mrs. Percy Lake.) Mr. and Mrs. Duncan lived on the Little Antler. At first, Jim Duncan built a big two story log home on the back part of the property, close to the creek. In 1930 he built the present house, close to the road.

The partnership lasted a long time. Alex Ritchie preferred Percheron horses because they are better rustlers. However, they did well with cattle, horses, hay fields and mixed farming.

In 1950 Jim Duncan sold the ranch to Frank Richter and in 1953 Frank Richter sold to Julius Pfister. Julius and Mitzi had 45 acres under cultivation with Hereford cattle, hay fields and mixed farming. In 1969 the Pfisters sold the ranch to Mr. Williams, owner of the Royal Antler Ranch. The Little Antler is currently the home of Bruce and Marj Nichol. ( 2006).

## DANCE ORCHESTRAS

**1906-** Professor and Mrs. Troyer had a dance orchestra in Windermere.

**1912- Wilmer Orchestra**- Mrs. Tynnacliffe on piano , Ed Tunnacliffe and Pat Kelly on fiddles. **1920'S- Haywire Orchestra** Gladys Pitts- piano, Charles Crook- banjo, Ed Tunnacliffe- violin

**Edgewater-** Mrs. Hanson- piano, Stanley Harrison and Bob Thompson.

**Columbia Valley Orchestra-** Gladys Pitts- piano, Low Dhiel- violin, Bill Hillier- drums and Harry Armstrong- saxophone.

**1930-** Frank Major played for dances ( piano) in summer in the open air.

**1933- Edgewater-** Hugh Sutton- drums, H. Voorhoeve- piano, Mr. Yorke- violin.

**1938- Tunny's Orchestra**- Marvin Tunnacliffe- piano, Ian Weir- saxophone, Charlie Sims- vocal and Bill Hillier- drums.

**1939- Dinty Moore-**A fine musician who stayed at the Delphine Hotel. Marvin Tunnacliffe and Ian Weir were great admirers. Mr. Moore played with all the orchestras when he was here.

**1946- Madson's Orchestra**- Mr. and Mrs. C. Madson arrived in the Valley. Eileen Madson on piano, Chris Madson- drums, Ian Robertson- saxophone, Joe LaRochelle- violin and Wanda Seel- violin.

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## Summer Display

This summer the museum will proudly display the works of artists and artisans who have been inspired by the beauty of our Valley. Many of these works are a part of the museum collection while some will be on loan from Valley residents.

Our display will feature pottery, photography, paintings, wood carvings and other artistic items of past eras.

If you have a painting or artistic object done by a former resident that you would like to share with visitors and members this summer, call the Curator at 342-2005.

( compiled by : Sandy McKay )