

VALLEY HISTORY
AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM
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THE CARLSONS
THELMA AND BROR
1932

Bror Natanael Karlsson (Carlson) , one of twelve children, was born in Hogsby, Smoland, Sweden on January 17, 1907.

Bror left by ship for Canada and arrived April 29,1928 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He road the rails from Halifax to Big Valley , Alberta where he was employed on a farm before coming west to Salmon Arm and then Wilmer in 1930.

Bror met and married Thelma Elizabeth Rauch on December 2, 1932. The wedding took place in Cranbrook with the Rev. Black officiating. Bror and Thelma had three children :

Edward (Ted) Natanael Carlson– Born April 30,1934 in Lady Bruce Memorial Hospital, Invermere and passed away in Whitehorse , Yukon on January 3, 2000.

Kurtis Emanvel Carlson– Born August 18, 1937 in Invermere, B. C.

Sonja Elizabeth Carlson– Born October 7,1942 at home in Wilmer, B.C.

Thelma E. Rauch was born in Wilmer, B.C., the second youngest and only daughter of Edward F. Rauch and Effie M. Rauch (nee Payne). Thelma was an excellent horsewoman and in the early 1930's she won many prizes horseback riding at the annual Fall Fairs.

When they were first married, they lived in the old Wilmer Courthouse (which is now owned by their daughter and son-in-law, Sonja and Bill Hemmelgarn). Bror built their house in Wilmer and they lived there throughout their lives. Their children attended school in Wilmer and Invermere. Ted loved to ride bareback in the rodeos. He worked for the Forestry cutting trails, was a big game guide and he played the guitar. Kurt loved motorcycles and fishing. Both him and Ted became carpenters after their father.

Somewhere along the line, Bror dropped the original spelling of Karlsson for Carlson and was also better known as Bill. He was naturalized on September 6, 1934.

Bror worked cutting axe ties from 1929 to 1943 for Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruitlands. On his broad axe is written that he cut 20,000 ties. That was a lot of hard work. In 1943 he worked on the C.V.I flume on Toby Benches with Oswald McGuiness as well as working on Sinclair Pass at Radium. In 1945 he became a freight truck driver after which he took up carpentry and built a lot of residences for locals as well as summer homes for Albertans. Among these was the

the George Duthie Memorial Clinic. Bror retired from carpentry in January 1975, but still worked 8 hours a day in his shop making juniper and diamond willow tables and lamps (for which he made birch lamp shades). While he was busy at this , Thelma spent her time doing petit point, needlework and oil painting.

In the early days, Thelma's friends were Nancy (Lee) Tegart, Phyllis Slump and Elsie Lund who went away to war but when she returned they remained steadfast friends until the end. Bror on the other hand, had mostly bachelor friends who consisted of Arvid Olson, Ole Elvastad, Andy Staberg, Isador Kain,(a relative of Conrad Kain) , Julius Crozeur, Ed Barbour, Andy Larson and George Renennkampf.

One of Sonja's happiest memories from childhood were the camping trips mostly every weekend in which she would lay awake at night in the tent with Burt Rauch (Thelma's brother) playing guitar, Julius on the banjo and Andy Larson on the accordion, lulling her to sleep.

In later years, their friends were Gordon and Elsie McKay, the Nixons, the Stathams, Cabots, Ronachers, Stan and Anita Frater, Gordon and Vi Stewart, Bert and Thelma Godlien, Ray and Lil Godlien, Sid and Jean Warner, Ed and Bessie Hoglund, Gus and Nel Osterlund, Bill and Jessie Fry, Jim and Eleanor Smith and John and Dorothy Koralewitz, to name a few. Almost everyone he built a home for, became his friend. Most notably, Dr. Don and Dorothy Pedlar from Calgary.

Bror could never pronounce "Th" as in Thelma, so he always called her "Selma". A highlight in youth was Christmas. Due to the Swedish background, we always opened gifts on Christmas Eve, but the children had to wait until midnight. However, Thelma usually saved a special present for Christmas morning. Also, Bror's older sister Magda, would send a Christmas package of pickled

herring from Sweden and Bror would mail her coffee (as apparently, they couldn't afford it). And of course, they certainly couldn't get Swedish herring in those days. Another memory was of Bror buying a milk cow so Sonja could have fresh milk in the depression but not very often did they get any milk as the neighbor would sneak over at night and milk the cow. However, once they were caught, the milk flowed freely.

The hardships in life were the same for everyone in those days. Thelma canned all their meat and pickled fish (due to no refrigeration). They had a cistern to hold water and kept the butter hanging from a pail in there to keep it from melting. One day , Thelma couldn't figure out why the water was all brown. Finally Ted confessed when he leaned over to get a bucket of water, his chewing tobacco plug box fell in the cistern. Thus the color. So it had to be drained and filled again. Lucky it was summer and the irrigation ditch still had fresh water running to fill it. As with everyone those were the days of coal oil lamps, the old wash board and sad irons for ironing. Later the coal oil was to be replaced by a gas lamp (which Thelma threw out the door many a times when it flared up !) They used a gas iron for ironing. The first washing machine had a crank handle, the second one being a gas one which belched black smoke. The radio was the only form of entertainment. They spent many evenings listening to the Lone Ranger, My Friend Erma and Saturday nights of course, it was The Sons of the Pioneers.

By - Sonja (Carlson) Hemmelgarn
Wilmer, B.C.

Mr. Fred Weeden

A little cottage on the green hillside above Wilmer shows no indication from the outside of the treasures within nor of the interesting person who lives there.

His name is Fred Weeden. He came to Canada from England in 1911 and to the Windermere Valley in 1933. His cottage in Wilmer contains an amazing collection of interesting items which are his pride and joy.

One is a famed copy of the Lord's Prayer. A descriptive caption below the poem says "There are only two copies of this beautiful poem in existence. One is said to have been written by King James I and the other is ascribed to Bishop Andrews".

Mr. Weeden, who haunts second hand stores in the hope of finding just such treasures, found this in one. Another time he found an 1851 oil painting of a German hound in a handsome metal frame. He has the complete works of Oliver Goldsmith dated 1859.

The clock shown on his wall is over 100 years old, a Seth Thomas of bronze and has a still functioning alarm. He bought it from Andy Larson, a well-known local watch-maker who was returning to Sweden.

With an appreciation of local history Mr. Weeden retains a charter appointing Basil George Hamilton, late pioneer citizen of Invermere, as a notary public in 1910.

Along with his liking for old-time mementoes, Mr. Weeden has a thrift tendency in his desire to make use of what other people throw away. He shows with pride his standing ashtray made from the steering column of a 1928 Chev and a good sturdy ashtray it is.

He does all his own work, eats at a once-handsome dining table and listens to his radio "to keep up with the world", and reads in his fine collection of books.

He has a neighborly philosophy of daily living based on a "Do Unto Others as You Would..." flavor. A neighbor complaining of a mislaid thimble found Fred on her doorstep an hour later with a collection of five thimbles for her to choose from. (Picked up in a second hand store with his sewing machine.)

And what does a bachelor want with a sewing machine?

Why he turns his shirt collars and patches his trousers, of course.

Mr. Weeden came to Canada "on the spur of the moment to join a friend." At Gleichen, Alberta, he worked for the Countess of Bubna, a relation of the Duke of Sutherland, for a year and later on the Rocky Mountain Polo Ranch west of Calgary. Horses were both his trade and his pleasure. In the early 1920's he was with Johnson's Race Horses in Calgary. Then he rode on horseback over the mountains to this Valley and near the Palliser River he met Bert Schofield, a name known to most old-timers, on his trap line.

These days, Mr. Weeden savors his daily routine in the little village of Wilmer. He makes friendly rounds to the neighbors and a daily trips to the post office. Mostly, he enjoys being home among the possessions that he has collected. They all have meaning for him and life has meaning for him because he enjoys it.

(Winn Weir Files -June 7 , 1962)

November 2, 1912

Miss Dorothy Davies, who is being sent out by the Equal Franchise League of Victoria to organize the women of the province for forming branches expects to be in Invermere by the end of the week. Mrs. Starke has kindly offered the use of the ladies parlor in the hotel for an afternoon meeting.

(Museum Files)

Lake Windermere

Musical and Literary Association

The newly formed club held its first meeting November, 1927. The meetings were held in the Senior room of the public school.

Chairman— James Sims

R. Gladwyn Newton gave a paper on “Rural Agriculture”, Dr. F.E. Coy talked on “Public Health”, Mrs. Ashworth played two selections from Mendellson, James Sims gave a vocal selection, and Mr. Skillings and Miss Patmore gave readings from “Julius Caesar”.

Mr. W. Weir expressed a willingness to conduct and train any aggregation who wished to take up either community or part singing as one of the season’s engagements.

The Literary Association carried on for many years.

(Museum Files)

Bert Beamish

Bert Beamish arrived in Edgewater in 1936 during the Depression from Regina. In Regina he had read a Columbia Valley Ranches advertisement. They were advertising cheap land for sale. When Bert arrived he started up a delivery service. His children were Gladys, Margaret, Arnold, Raymond, Carrie, Elaine and Yvonne. Gladys married Gordon Ferguson who had purchased property from Columbia Valley Ranches in 1936 . Gladys and Gordon farmed and had a market garden.

March 1913- Museum Files

The highway bridge over the Columbia River in Athalmer is taking great shape. There are 12 men working on it under the supervision of David Bale. It will rest on 100 piles, will be 20 ft. wide, 139 ft. long and about 300 ft. above the bed of the river.

Mink Ranching—Brisco

In 1936 100 mink were brought in by Erik Linden and Otto Malberg. In the fall of 1936 John and Lloyd Watkins bought 6 mink each. Lloyd, over the years had over 100 mink. They were carefully graded and sorted, keeping the best for breeding. They were pelted in the fall and the skins were sold to fur buyers.

Other mink breeders were Percy Berry, Martin Rasmussen, and Joe Watkins. However, meat prices went up and mink prices went down and the mink farmers sold their mink in 1950.

In the 1930’s Miss Amy Nixon, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wilber Nixon , had a fir ranch in Wilmer. In 1945, Paul and Amy (Nixon) Gropp purchased Sunshine Ranch from Mr. and Mrs. T.N. Bavin. Paul and Amy and son Carl were successful with their combination of mixed farming and fur farming. They raised mink and martin. Amy eventually sold the Sunshine Ranch to the government.

SPECIAL THANKS- to Lynne and Gordon Askey for putting together “ The Reunion of the Builders” of the Invermere Community Hall on it’s 60th Anniversary . (June 30, 2007.)

Gordon asked me if I would check with my Dad, Jim McKay, and get some information on who was there in 1947. This is what he wrote:

“ Joe Peters and I had three teams of horses and we dug the basement using a slip. We would fill the slip with dirt from the basement and haul it out of the hole and dump it. I was 17 years old.

Major Bell was in charge and Bill Carlson was one of the carpenters. As for the rest of them, I can’t be sure. Bill Bond was there but check with Joy. George Thornton and Nat Bavin were also there.”

(compiled by—Sandy McKay)