

VALLEY HISTORY
AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM
BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A 1K0 342-9769 AUGUST 2008



Marie (May) Kathleen Starke

Marie Kathleen Starke was born on Feb. 9, 1908 in Spokane, Wash. U.S.A. to Royal N. Riblet and May W. Smith. The birth certificate has her name recorded as Kathleen Gwen Riblet. Her mother died due to tuberculosis shortly after Kathleen was born, who then was adopted by George and Delphine Starke of Wilmer B.C. The baby was then renamed May Graham Starke. At some later date, she apparently changed her name to Marie Kathleen Starke.

The connection between the Riblets and the Starkes is not well documented. It is believed that Mr. Starke was involved with mining in the valley and became involved with the Riblet Tranway Company who manufactured various kinds of mining equipment. They had an office in Nelson, which it is suspected is where Mr. Starke met Mr. Riblet. Mr. Starke built the Delphine Lodge in Wilmer, hotels in Athalmer and Windermere as well as the original Invermere Hotel,

which he managed for some years.

The Starkes lived in Wilmer for many years. In 1918 the Starkes moved to Victoria because George wasn't well and thought the change of air would help. That was not to be however, as he died in January of that year. Delphine was originally from Quebec, so she and her daughter, May, moved to Montreal and moved in with the Pare' Family. May was 10 years old. In November 1921 Delphine died of cancer when May was just 13. She continued to live with the Pare's and her mother's estate was managed by Colonel Dennis who was associated with the CPR in Montreal. She was given \$60.00 per month for her rent and living expenses. Around this time she changed her name to Marie Kathleen Starke and was known by that name at the convent.

May got her schooling as a day student at a Catholic Convent within walking distance from the Pare's. It was there that she learned to play the piano under the tutelage of Sr. Catherine and earned her Lauriat from the "Academie de Musique de Quebec, avec distinction," in June 1926 at the age of 18 years. After graduating from the Convent, she was employed by CPR in Montreal as a steno-clerk, and was known as Marie Kathleen Starke.

Sometime after 1926 Marie made a visit to the Valley where she met George Williamson. She returned to Montreal but presumably preferred the West and returned to the Valley. Marie and George were married in Calgary Alberta. The marriage was witnessed by William Cleland and Colonel Dennis on June 22, 1929. Since many of the older residents of the valley knew her as the

daughter of the Starkes, who called her May, she was known as May Williamson from then on.

May and George lived in the upstairs apartment of the CVI building for four years and then moved into the Livery Stable offices next door, which had been converted into a two bedroom house. They had two sons, Dennis born 1930 and Derrek born 1934.

In 1934, an uncle living in Vancouver traced May and through a Nelson Lawyer, informed May that she had a sister living in Spokane, Washington. They arranged a meeting at the train station in Cranbrook and became instant soul-sisters. It was discovered that her sister, Gretchen Carpenter (married name) was born in Nelson B.C. May had trouble during the war crossing into the USA and Gretchen had difficulty crossing into Canada because neither had a valid citizenship papers. Apparently the border authorities looked the other way.

May had many friends. Early on she and Barbara (nee Scott) Pietrosky, Greta Marples, Loraine Howarth, Winn (Witchy) Weir, Gladys Pitts, Barbara and Anna Bartman, Alice Curtis (school principal) , Mrs. Coy, Alice McGrath (Canal Flats), Val Rossington, Mrs. Dacosta, could be counted as frequent visitors.

Many of the nurses and teachers who came and left the valley were frequent visitors at the Williamson home.

May was involved with a local theatre group who put on entertainment in the Athalmer Legion Hall for several years during the war, with proceeds going to the soldiers who left the valley. She also played the organ at the Catholic church, especially at weddings and Midnight Mass. At one Midnight Mass, Dolores Appleby (wife of Benny Mitchell) sang the Ave Maria hymn, which left not one dry eye in the church.

In 1949 May received sad news from Spokane, her sister Gretchen died of an aneurysm. May became inconsolable for a long

time after that.

In 1952 her first son, Dennis graduated from UBC and moved to Ontario. In 1954 her second son, Derrek also moved to Ontario.

In 1958 May and George also moved to Ontario and lived in Markham (near Toronto) until George retired from the service station business that he and Derrek operated. They then moved to Amherstview, (near Kingston) where Dennis and his family lived. George passed away in Nov. 1982, at the age of 83 and May passed away in Jan. 1997 at the age of 89.

(Dennis Williamson 2008)

Windermere Valley 1950

Scarcity of forage in their own habitat has driven deer to the farmers' yards and pastures and much damage has been reported. A.W. G. Statham of Wilmer built an eight foot fence around a haystack but the marauders succeeded in topping it. He reports the loss of several tons of hay. Gordon Rad of Lake Lillian also reports serious hay loss.

(Museum Files)

The Columbian Wilmer B.C.

August 8, 1911

The Wilmer Waterworks is fast nearing completion under the supervision of Mr. Larabee. It is expected that the work will be completed not later than August 5 . The estimated cost of the water system will be in the vicinity of \$3000.00. This work will mean a great boon to the townspeople who will be supplied with excellent water at a moderate cost.

Radium Hot Springs Lodge

As the original Banff-Windermere Highway was nearing completion in 1923 the Canadian Pacific Railway Company constructed bungalow camp type resorts throughout this area of the Rockies and one of these was known as Sinclair Hot Springs Lodge, this being Radium's former name. The company chose a hill overlooking the hot mineral pool which had just been completed by the Federal Government. They were fortunate in obtaining a most efficient and dauntless manageress in the person of Miss Charlotte Armstrong. She was assisted for the first three years by her sister Ruth, but continued on in her very capable manner until 1937 when the CPR sold the property to her.

In 1949, when the B.C. Power commission was about to go into operation in the area, she realized that the lodge would find it difficult to cope with all this entail. In June 1949, she sold the business to Mr. and Mrs. H. B. Williams. They proceeded to make the conversion to electricity as well as other improvements.

In March 1952, the property was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Duncan G. McIntosh.

Miss Armstrong told of when she and her sister arrived at Radium in June 1923. They found three construction crews at work: Captain John Blakley was building his hotel, the Federal Government their entrance gateway to the park, and the CPR workmen were busy on the hillside erecting the Lodge.

The main Lodge, with its massive fireplace and its chimney constructed of Mt. Rundle rock, was nearing completion, but the sleeping quarters were nil. They were to be brown canvas cabin-like tents, built from the wooden platforms.

Telephone contacts with Banff was another frustration as it was usually quite un-

satisfactory. However, on opening day the Armstrong sisters were amused to receive a telegram from the superintendent of Bungalows Camp for the CPR which read as follows: "Congratulations on your opening. Be sure to have your flag flying."

The flag was the least of their worries but as luck would have it a flag was one of the items they had received in time!

In the early years and indeed until a few years after the McIntoshes took over the Lodge, it was open only during the summer months. Most of the first guests were transported by limousine or bus from Banff after having arrived there on a CPR train. They included many notable persons such as the Canadian Poet, Bliss Carman, and the most noteworthy of all, Sir Winston Churchill. He was accompanied by his son, Randolph, his brother and a nephew.

As Sir Winston descended from the limousine in front of the Lodge his first comment to Miss Armstrong was, "What have you got for dinner? I hope it's not trout. That's what everyone has been feeding me."

He and his party occupied one of the Bungalows for a week in 1929 and seemed to thoroughly enjoy their accommodation and meals as well as the bathing in the hot pool. A few years ago an item appeared in the Calgary Herald in which someone recalled talking to Sir Winston while they were soaking in the Hot Springs.

June 30, 1923 was set for the official opening of the Banff Windermere Highway and it was doubtful if any of the three projects would be entirely completed by this day. The Government erected an archway of 4x4's through which the cars passed.

The Armstrongs worked out a system of mutual exchange with the Blakleys for various items that each urgently needed for opening day.

(Museum Files)

John McLeod

John McLeod was a resident of Invermere during the decade of the 1950's. Not a long span of time from a historic point of view, although, through his extensive community involvement, I do believe that he did indeed leave his "footprint" in the history of the Windermere Valley.

John was born in 1926 in Powell River, B.C. He was the son of our Mother, Nellie Dunn (Mrs. Roy Lake) and was raised by our Grandparents on our Mother's side. Only occasionally did John visit with our Mother during his early years.

John left school at the age of 14 to work for the Powell River Pulp and Paper Co. until he was called to the Canadian Mercantile Marine Service, did world travel with various cargo/shipping employers and was enlisted with the Canadian Army until 1946.

As a young married man, 25 years of age, he moved to Invermere in 1951 to reunite with his mother and to get to know the Lake family. He worked for a time for my father, Roy Lake, owner of Lake Auto Service, before becoming self employed in his own small trucking and delivery service for the area from Golden to Kimberley.

John had two lifelong passions: Photography and Law Enforcement. He was committed to both of these interests and successfully managed to incorporate one with the other for employment purposes.

In Invermere, through his sincere respect and friendship with long time resident Ernest Fisher, John advanced his photographic skills. Mr. Fisher was an avid and well known photographer in the Valley and upon his death, he had bequeathed his equipment and prolific collection of his works to John.

John, with his camera, were almost inseparable! Somewhat similar to the cell phone phase as we know it today. There were few events of importance in the area during the 50's decade that were not captured on film by John. Be the event civic, news worthy, family special occasions of weddings or graduations and of course, the incredible scenic opportunities that nature provided. All such occasions would be a true source of inspiration to a photographer. Sadly, there were also the tragic and

criminal events, sometimes resulting in human fatalities. John was employed as an on call guard with the Invermere R.C.M.P. detachment as a general assistant as required in this capacity and as a photographer.

The Toby Theatre was an important part of the entertainment scene during the 50's. John was the projectionist for the weekly movie times. A duty he took seriously as he knew how important this was to the children. The upstairs suite of the Toby Block was their residence. A convenient location for this endeavor.

In 1954 John McLeod and P.L. Conroy assisted by their respective wives, commenced production and publishing of the Valley Echo. The district had been without a local newspaper for many years. Later the Valley Echo was sold to Earl Gray in 1955 and renamed the Columbia Valley Echo, still later, it was renamed the Lake Windermere Valley Echo.

In 1960 John moved to Calgary to launch a twenty-five year career in Law Enforcement with the Calgary Correctional Institute (Spy Hill). When he left Invermere, he donated the Ernest Fisher collection of historic photographic inventory, along with his own works to the local museum. He wanted the works to be reprinted whenever needed or wanted. He was proud of his work and stamped and signed many of his projects.

John McLeod was posthumously honored in 1990 by the Governor General of Canada with a Corrections Exemplary Service medal, in recognition of his meritorious service in law enforcement in Canada. He had been an effective officer who distinguished himself by showing interest in the law offenders by initiating programs within the institution for photography.

John died in Calgary in 1986 of cancer.

By: Catherine Clausen (nee Lake)
- daughter of Roy and Nellie Lake
- sister of John McLeod.

Happy 90th Birthday

Joy Bond (Aug.24) and Ray Crook (Sept.1)

(compiled by Sandy McKay)