

VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 250-342-9769 May 2010



Annie Elizabeth Harper McKay

To turn back the clock to the early pioneer days in the valley is to hear a tale vastly different from life in the Valley today. There are few women left who lived here in 1900 and few, indeed, who can paint a vivid word-picture of what that life consisted. But there is one at least, and she is Annie McKay widow of James Lorenzo McKay, pioneer rancher and sawmill operator, who was the son of John McKay, early day settler who had staked the site of Radium Hot Springs in 1887.

Mrs. McKay came to the Valley in April 1900. She had been married in Golden, lived briefly in Calgary and then, still a bride, came to the Upper Ranch (Sinclair Ranch) about three miles north of Radium Hot Springs. Later they lived in Athalmer where Mr. McKay owned the town site. In the intervening years Mrs. McKay lived to the full, the pioneer life of the day. She lived in the Valley for thirty years.

Annie Elizabeth Harper was born in Quebec. She came west with her parents after the Riel Rebellion of which her father was a veteran and lived in Calgary.

The Upper Ranch to which she came after her marriage was one of the two ranches which made up the McKay estate "Elk Park Ranch". The other at Luxor was known as the Lower Ranch. There was a big housewarming when they moved into the Upper Ranch home. It lasted from 6 at night till 6 in the morning and everyone came from up and down the Valley. For the births of her children, Mrs. McKay went to Golden, traveling on the Columbia River steamers. In 1911, because the schooling of the children had become a major problem, the family moved to Athalmer and in 1913 the big house on the lakeshore, The McKay House, was built.

In 1908, the two older boys had started school at Wilmer, boarding there during the week and returning home for the week-end. There were a dozen pupils in the school, among them Harold and Billy McKay, Alfred, Phil and Gimp Larabee, Jim, Billy and Edna Ball, Maurice Chamberlain, Sally Brehaut and Mel Rutherford.

When the Athalmer school was built (later it was moved to Invermere and became the school annex), there were three McKay's attending among the eight pupils. Dorothy, although a little under starting age, was allowed to go to make up the necessary number.

Mrs. McKay describes her life as "very busy." Four sons and three daughters would keep a woman busy in any generation and keeping house in her generation was a full

had a garden. Staple food supplies had to come from Golden or from Jennings, Montana. In the summer and fall, garden produce had to be canned for the long winter months.

Mrs. McKay recounted some memorable experiences. There was the New Year's day that Jim McKay took his wife for a horse and cutter ride down the Columbia River channel. Suddenly the horse disappeared except his nose and ears sticking through the ice. Jim jumped out and managed to un-hitch the horse but could not pull him up. There were only moments to spare. He grabbed the axe from the cutter and hacked a hole in the ice but the horse could not get its footing to push itself out. Working against time, Jim cut a channel to shore pulling the horse along until it could get its feet on the bottom and help itself out. "The poor creature had a blanket of frost on it when we reached home but it survived."

And there was the day when Mrs. McKay had two of the little girls in the buggy with her. She had to get out to open two gates, drive through and close them after her. She managed the first all right but at the second gate the horse bolted before she could clamber back into the wagon. She could see the two little girls, Dorothy and Marion, being tossed on the seat. Down the hill and around a bend in the road, horse and buggy went. She said she never expected to see her children alive again. Hurrying after them she heard a child cry and found two year old Marion by the roadside, terrified but not seriously hurt. Further on, she came to the wagon with Dorothy still clinging to the seat. It was moments like that that made the life of the pioneers hard, not the long hours of work or the lack of leisure.

And who were her women neighbours at Athalmer? Mrs. Joe Lake, whose husband had the store; Mrs. Cornwall, the mother of the banker; Mrs. Green, Mrs. Frank Dreier's mother; Mrs. Jim Duncan, Mrs. Tom Barry, Mrs. Bob Lawerson, Mrs. Charles Crook,

Mrs. Tom Lee and Mrs. E.M. Corby.

"Those were good days in the Valley," she said with a smile and a sigh, "Yes, they were good days."

Winn Weir Files

Memories of Pack Trips And Guiding Days

By Madeline Turnor—1916

My first trip by pack train into the mountains took place in 1916. In July, the MacCarthys were taking a party of friends up Jumbo and Toby Creek for mountain climbing and exploration. I was asked to go along to help Mrs. MacCarthy with the cooking and other chores. We all met at Jack Pine, driving there by horse and democrat, where the pack train was waiting with guide, Bill Williams, from the Shuswap Reserve and Conrad Kain who was the Austrian mountain guide.

We climbed Mt. Nelson the next day and from there went up the north fork of Toby Creek where several peaks were climbed. From there we went up Jumbo Creek and branched off to the head of the south fork where Mt. Truce and Mt. Cauldron were ascended. I stayed in camp to look after some of the party not climbing. We stayed there several days before going down again to the Toby Creek Trail and on to Earl Grey Pass to climb there but a heavy snowstorm made climbing too dangerous. On the way down from the pass we lost one of our pack horses, who was not shod and slipped turning a corner on the wet slippery trail, falling to the moraine below. I was left to look after the pack train while the men went down to find the horse who was not alive. They carried the packs up and put them on other horses. We did not have saddle horses, except for the packer, and all of us walked on the trail.

It was tough going too ! After leaving the north fork of Toby Creek, we stayed the night at Earl Grey Cabin, which was a beautiful cabin, having been built about 1910.

(*Museum Files*)

Frederick C. Law.

I left Ontario in February 1886 and came by train as far as Canmore which was then the end of steel. I then traveled on snow shoes with two dog teams to Golden. I stayed in Golden City at a construction camp for two or three days and there I joined with a party who were coming through to the Columbia Lakes. We had our baggage drawn on a sleigh which we bought in Golden and drew it ourselves up the ice on the Columbia River to a point known as " Whiskey Hill " near where the station of Harrowgate stands. There the Columbia River was open so we had to abandon it. There we caught some stray horses which were on the range. We tied our stuff on them as best we could and rode others through to the Lower Columbia Lake. There were three others in the party besides myself. They were Billy Deane and Matt Curver. Matt Curver had a little house at the foot of the hill just west of what is now Athalmer. I bought out his interest in that for \$300.00. I also took up what was equal to three preemptions taking them up in the names of myself and Charles A. Warren and Reuven Hamlin, son of a very rich man, Alvert Colthard. These preemptions took in what are now the town sites of Athalmer and Invermere. The next year we all sold out to Hamlin who took Edmund Thomas Johnston into partnership. I quit all matters pertaining to land about then and went into a partnership with Mr. Osler Hamond of Toronto. I remained with them for about

five years. In 1890 I ran for the Provincial House against Colonel Baker who defeated me by three votes. After 1892 I retired to the Coast where I have been living ever since. In the years 1892-93 I was commissioner to the World's Fair at Chicago for the Government of the Province of British Columbia.

I have been up and down over the whole of the interior of British Columbia ever since. I am keenly interested in all pertaining to mines and mining.

" Yes! Law Creek, the tributary of Horse Thief Creek is called after me."

(*Museum Files*)

Indian News

(contributed by Dominic Nicholas)

October 1944

Stationed in Vancouver at Hastings Park, both Joe Eugene and Martin Sam were back on leaves for one week. Arriving in Golden Thursday afternoon they caught Friday's stage and spent their New Years here. They both report a swell time. They left for the coast on Tuesday's train.

Christmas midnight Mass was said by the Indian Missionary Father W. Murphy at the St. Eugene Mission. Quite a number of Indians from the different reserves attended this feast. The Indian Choir sang for these Masses and it was good. Their hymns were composed mostly of Christmas carols.

Louis Capilo of the Shuswap Reserve is trapping on Shuswap Creek, near the headwaters. He came in before Christmas with two marten pelts for which he received \$88.00.

Mose Teneese is trapping up Toby Creek. Three marten and one lynx was his catch before Christmas. The local fur buyer paid him \$165.00 for his catch.

Gus Alpine and Leonard Stanley came down from Findlay Creek with three marten and sold to the fur buyer at Cranbrook for \$110.00.

The engagement has been announced of Mary Agnes of Cranbrook to Moses Michel of Fairmont. The wedding to take place sometime later this month.

Phyllis Nicholas, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dominic Nicholas has been called to Jasper, Alberta to take up a position in the hospital. She left right after Christmas in company with Mary Theresa Francis of Cranbrook, who is also going to work there.

Down at St. Eugene Mission, we regret to convey to you that Mrs. Joe Stanley is confined at the St. Eugene Hospital suffering with the flu. Incidentally, Dave Capilo and Louie Capilo are her brothers.

Mrs. Angelic Toby Nicholas is visiting her sister Mrs. Sam in Athalmer.

(Museum Files)

Golden Star

April 1929- "The annual ball of the District Cricket Club opened the dancing season at the David Thompson Memorial post and was a pronounced success in every one of its features."

June 1929- "Last Saturday evening a very enjoyable dance was given at Sinclair Hot Springs Bungalow camp. The invitations were artistically done, the hosts being Messrs. Sibbald, , Horsey and Robb, and the

dance being given in honor of Mr. Sibbald's five daughters and his granddaughter. There were a large number of local and out of town guests. "

Mrs. Harry Peters

Amy Peters heard about the Windermere Valley from Eldred Walker, the editor of the Bristol Newspaper, who knew about John Gibbon who was looking for someone to work on his farm. Gibbon was a C.P.R. publicity agent whose car broke down while traveling through the Valley. While waiting for repairs, Gibbon met Mr. Mallendaine who was a promoter for the Columbia Valley Irrigation. He sold Gibbon land on the Benches. The Peters arrived in 1912 from Somerset, England to Golden. Then three days from Golden to Invermere. They settled on the Gibbon farm and they worked for \$40.00 a month. There they raised Joe, Joan and Ruth.

(Museum Files)

Museum Update

The painting of the ceiling and walls of the main floor is now complete. It has given the main building of the museum a fresh look.

The summer theme will be "Culture of the First Nations People."

Our open house will be May 29th from 2 p.m to 4 p.m , with tea served. Come and see our many new displays.

We open June 1st for the summer. Seven days a week-10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

(compiled by Sandy McKay)