

VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 250-342-9769 Feb. 2011



Joe and Barbara Pietrosky

Joe and Barbara Pietrosky are of the generation that grew up around here when it was still a quiet settlement in the mountains, relatively untouched by the spreading fingers of metropolitan life elsewhere. For them, Invermere was the cosmopolitan centre of the valley and it provided most of their needs. There was Wing Lee's, or Pitt's store, or Fisher's or Newton's. There was enough here to ensure you didn't have to go too far to buy your basics and what you couldn't get, you did without.

Joe had moved here when he was 18 from the Alberta town of Blairmore. His family fled the depression but Joe finished his high school before joining them in Canal Flats. He left the small mining and lumbering community not knowing what he was coming to, but the Flats was enjoying a boom period and he need not have been too worried about his future in some out-of-the-way place, "somewhere in the Kootenays". The Flats had very little variety to offer, but what it

had, it had a lot of. For instance, 3 or 4 hotels and they were kept busy by the constant stream of loggers that poured in every pay day to wash away a few weeks of work in the bush.

Joe's father opened a butcher's shop and hotel, but later moved the business, minus the hotel, to Athalmer. Wild meat graced many a table in those days and it wasn't out of choice. Today the Pietrosky's are probably typical of many others when they can hardly stand the sight of wild meat. But in the 30's, the closeness of the bush kept food on the table for many families.

Barbara Scott, typical of many other valley women, was busy in those days with chores like bottling meat, canning and storing chores that required many hours of kitchen duty, but it meant that a decent supply of food would be available throughout the year. During the winter months, the frozen lake was as useful to the settlers as the bush and it was a common sight to see the great chunks of ice being carved out of the ice covering to be taken back to the frames and stored in sawdust.

The Scotts had arrived from Scotland, Aberdeenshire, and after a period in Golden the carpenter/millwright had brought his family to Invermere. In 1912 they had settled on the West side of Invermere close to the school and relatively close to the stores.

Joe and Barbara were married in 1935 and the Minister who married them was living in Pynelogs and so that was where the wedding took place. After living in Athalmer, they moved into Invermere and became neighbours with their good friends, Jessie and Bill Lockhart.

The Lockharts were married the year after the Pietroskys. Always good companions, they didn't have to go far to visit each other and Bill and Joe could still go down to the old Tin House and order a 'yard of beer'.... 18 glasses.

"There was always a bunch of us together," remembered Barbara, "and we'd have a central gathering place. There'd be us, the Lockharts, Fraters, Foystens, Joe Peters and his sisters, and the Kirkpatricks.... We did things as a group." And that carried through in every day affairs like building a house or looking after children. It was always a sharing time. "Everyone was in the same boat then." said Joe. "And of course nobody was getting rich while their friends were struggling. Those kind of opportunities just didn't come along then."

When the war broke out, the men were gradually called up or enlisted and in 1941 Jack Solinger and Joe were enlisted in the Army Services Corps, in training as heavy duty drivers. Jack didn't even get his full training before he was sent overseas, but Joe was placed in charge of Driver Instruction, mechanics and maintenance. He found it rather frustrating, watching others going overseas but spent the war years in various places around Canada undergoing exercises as part of a solid home front.

Joe was away from home from 1941 to 1943. "It was strict discipline" he said, "Didn't harm us at all." For Barbara it was hard making ends meet though. Food and payments had to be made on \$18.00 a month and she remembers feeling that "had Joe been sent overseas, well, you just didn't think about it, you just had to accept it." It was a philosophy that many people had during the 30's and 40's.

In recent years, the Peitrosky's have been known for managing the gas station at the Cross-roads and today they enjoy their leisure years on the property they first bought with the aid of the Veteran's Land Grant.

The 30's and 40's for them were times of hard work, but a special kind of bond grew up with their friends in those years. "And you know," laughed Barbara, "the cold never seemed to bother us and we really had fun!"

(Museum files)

From Looking Back by Jack Peach 1923

"At the canyon, Blakley's Hotel almost overhung the chasm carved by Sinclair Creek. Miss Armstrong's Bungalow camp, which she purchased from the CPR, perched on a spur of rock high above the lumpy road and a campground just east of the cluster of buildings. There was the pool and the bath house, log structures separated from icy creek waters by a concrete wall, the log park gate, a house for the gatekeeper, another for the Mounties, and the year I was there, a new service station that was part of the lodge properties.

Radium was most famous for its hot and sulphur-free waters. Its second claim to fame was its location, an energetic day's drive from Calgary for newlyweds who had exchanged vows early in the day in the city. The lodge was newly opened the year I was there. Customers were scarce, frugal and choosy. The only way to lure them and hold them was to offer most detailed and uninterrupted service.

This I did as the lodge's only bellhop-cum-handyman. We had less than a dozen rooms, two cooks of Chinese origin, one chambermaid, and the proprietor and his wife who was the skilled foreman.

I had to keep the plumbing in shape, haul groceries up a four metre ladder to the kitchen, keep the gasoline-powered lighting plant working, run the ice-cream parlor during the afternoons, carry luggage up and down three flights of stairs, wipe windshields, book guests and, if there was any spare time, help

spare time, help wait on tables in the dining room at rush hour. I also had to trot down the road at noon to pump gas at the service station to relieve the regular operator for lunch.

One weekly chore was to haul bulk food supplies from the railway down in the Columbia Valley. It meant a five-kilometer trip in a pickup truck to a lonely whistle stop on the CPR line.

The Blakley boy from the other hotel drove a half ton that was merely a platform behind a cab. "We would arrive at the siding and park together beside an old boxcar used as a station shed and listen for the mixed train shunting lumber cars up the line at Spillimacheen. We would swat mosquitoes and exchange small talk.

If the freight train had time, it would stop. With our trucks alongside, the transfer of cargo was a simple matter. But one memorable night the train, very late, only slowed down at our tiny stop because the crew had an overnight rendezvous down the line at Windermere. Out of the yawning baggage doors came thumping bundles, crates and boxes, sailing into the black of the night.

The crew waved cheerily and kept chucking as the engine chugged softly until the train was swallowed in the valley gloom. Before the noise had died we began groping for our groceries.

"Fifty pounds of flour for you, 50 for me." "Whoops, this has a rip in it from this bush..... help me yank it out of the branches will you?" "A carton of juice, now that will be mine." "Here's your 50 pounds of butter, and here's mine!" "I think this is your side of beef." In the pallid flow of the headlights we probed and sorted and retrieved.

Then suddenly the Blakley boy disappeared, swallowed by the night. I heard some language unlike any that had filled my

ears so far in my 18 years. I groped to where he lay, cursing, on his back on the cinders alongside the track. He was raw egg from tip to toe. The crew had tossed off two 24 dozen crates of eggs, and with unerring accuracy, had hit exactly the same spot with a sack of sugar.

The Blakley boy had a slippery drive home looking like unmixed cake batter. We crawled our vehicles up the serpentine mountain road to the hot springs, for a crate of oranges had split open too. I followed at a discreet distance making a lot of stops along the way. I must have picked up two and half dozen dusty oranges. Those were Depression days when every morsel of food was precious.

The boss appeared in pajamas and gown, and asked; "What took you so long?" There was only one logical reply.....

"I think we should share eggs with the Blakley's this week. And some oranges. They'll likely run short."

(Museum Files)

Excerpts from B.G. Hamilton Diary 1915

January 1- Arrived at golden per train from Calgary at 3:00 am. Stayed at Columbia Hotel, left call for 6:00 a.m. in order to catch Kootenay Central for Edgewater. Was not called so missed train, first in 27 years. As there was no other train until Tuesday, I determined to walk home to Invermere.

Expressed my suitcases and walked 14 1/2 miles. Spent the night at T.J. Weston's. Weather mild.

January 2- Wearing ordinary winter clothing, bowler hat, light kid gloves and rubbers. Lunched at Johnston's 19 1/2 mile post. Slept at McKeeman's 30 mile post. Road good. Settlers happy.

January 3- Started at 9:00 a.m. Had a lift of seven miles. Lunched at McIntosh's 42 mile post then walked to Stanley B. Harrison's at 54 mile post. Spent the night there. Walk for the day..... 24 miles.

January 4- Started from Harrison's at 7:50 a.m. Stopped for lunch at Dave Larmour's, 64 mile post. Reached home at 8:00 p.m. Distance traveled -

Invermere Notes **April 25, 1924**

30 miles with two lifts aggregating five miles. There had been heavy snow and drifting in night so had to break trail. First through Kootenay Central train reached Athalmer at noon today from the south. "Mixed" train with four passengers. Some 100 persons met them.

January 5 - Have a cold and feeling very stiff. Word has gone forth that as a matter of curtailment of expense, the Invermere Branch of the Bank of Montreal and of the Imperial Bank will be closed on the 22nd.

January 12- Curling and skating very much in vogue.

January 21- Imperial Bank of Canada and Bank of Montreal closed their offices in Invermere and moved to Athalmer.

January 29- Ice on Lake Windermere is 24 inches thick and clear as glass.

January 30- There are still evidences all along the main road to Toby Bridge of the December overflow of Toby Creek. The whole flat is one mass of ice four inches thick clinging to bushes a foot off the ground.

April 5- Butter 45 cents a pound; eggs 35 cents a dozen; chick feed or wheat, \$3.25 per 100 lbs.

May 24- Empire Day—attended formal opening of Invermere Golf and Country Club.

May 26- Bacon 28 cents a pound by the side.

September 14—Imperial Bank of Canada today closed its Athalmer branch and re-opened in Invermere.

Wages of laborers down to \$1.75 or \$2.00 per day. Local wages for Chinamen as domestic workers now down to \$20.00 and board per month.

December 18, 1915- A census of the population of Invermere and Invermere Heights shows the entire population to be 150 including men, women and children.

Meteorological returns from the Dominion Experimental Farm for 1915 show total precipitation for the year to be 19.08 inches. April to September inclusive, 11.25 inches. Hours of sunshine for the year 1,753.5.

In anticipation of the increased motor travel that is bound to favor this district once the Banff-Windermere motor highway opens for the season, the pretty old village of Windermere is taking on a new lease and all sorts of internal development is taking place there. In addition to the extensive improvements which were added lately to the Windermere hotel property, there are two more garage buildings, one for Lloyd Tegart and the second for the Invermere Contracting Company, Ltd. Both of these will be thoroughly up-to-date in every respect. Other improvements are mentioned, such as the establishment of up-to-date tea rooms and rest houses.

W.R. Henley, late in charge of the provincial police station for the district but now at Ymir, came in on his holidays by train last week and returned with his own car via Cranbrook to his new post.

Mrs. Ashworth spent several days with relatives in Cranbrook. Mr. Ashworth, manager of the Imperial Bank of Canada here, took advantage of the Easter holidays and a passing car and journeyed there Sunday.

(Museum Files)

Summer 2011

The theme at the museum this summer will be TOYS ALIVE. The curator, Dorothy Blunden is looking for pioneer toys.

Heritage Week is February 21-27 with a theme of B.C.Parks. The museum will be holding an open house on March 20 featuring B.C. Parks and Park Memories.

(compiled by Sandy McKay)