NOTES FROM THE ARCHIVES APRIL, 1996

Early history of Windermere written by Harry Richardson:

I was pleased..... it brought back memories of those far off days when Pitts Store was the main gathering place of the community in the long winter nights as we gathered around the large wood fired stove to await the arrival of the royal mail. For many years, Mr. Pitts had the contract of picking up the mail from Athalmer with his team and sleigh. Charles Van Fleck drove that team and carried the mail for many years.

In the winter, the lake was used as the highway from Windermere to Athalmer. Prior to Mr. Pitts having the mail contract, it was brought up from Athalmer by Mr. R.A. Kimpton in his large car, possibly the only one of that make that was ever in the Valley. The name plate on the radiator was, H.A. Moyer, Syracuse, N.Y. Several interesting stories could be related on this car as it delivered the mail away back in 1916 when we spent the best part of a night stuck on the old Athalmer hill.

Mr. J.C. Pitts had that store built in 1912 and my father, along with Frederick Kimpton were the carpenters employed in its construction. The supports, which support the overhang of the roof were constructed by my father in his old workshop which had formerly been the first blacksmith shop in Windermere and operated by George Geary in the early 1890's.

Shortly after Mr. Pitts had this store constructed the property directly across the street from the store was set apart and was known in the area for years as "The Park." That large piece of property was fenced in with a well constructed fence of heavy posts and a decorative wire. At that time we were informed that within a few short years a large hotel would be erected. Just inside that fence on the north east corner there was a tall Flagpole erected and it stood there for many years. Each day the flag was flown from that pole as it was from the school flag pole. I still have a picture of that flag pole being erected in the corner of that park by Edgar Stoddart, Sinclair Craig and a number of other pioneers.

Prior to moving into this new store in 1912, Mr. J.C. Pitts operated a general store in the building across the street which still stands and which for many years had Mr. Kimpton's name on it. That Kimpton building is very old and has quite a history over the years, but it is very doubtful that it is the oldest building in Windermere.

In the early fall of 1888, my father along with a number of others, from the Placer Operations on Finlay Creek, stopped overnight at the Windermere Hotel, which at that time was operated by Presler and Cummings. Others in the party included Lady Adela Cochrane, Mrs. Algernon St. Maur. They were to meet their husbands at the hotel as they returned from a big game hunt in the area. All were returning to Mitford, Alberta where Lieut. Thomas B.H. Cochrane had a small sawmill and a narrow gauge railway in operation, in that area.

The log portion of the Windermere Hotel, the R.A. Kimpton Building and the George Geary buildings (of which there were many), are the three oldest in the town. The George Geary farm buildings, together with their many buildings to take care of the numerous freighters, plus the blacksmith shop date back prior to 1893. In the late 1890's, the Geary place was renamed and licenced under the name of the Lakeside Hotel.

Mr. R.A. Kimpton was operating in the Windermere area in the very early 1890's and had a small group of buildings to the east of the present White House. When day school started in Windermere in 1894 they used one of Mr. Kimpton's buildings which he had just vacated. In the early spring of 1899, Mr. Kimpton started the construction of a group of stables to take care of the horses which would be used on the freight, express and mail route between Golden and Windermere.

In 1896 and 1897, Valley pioneer, Joe Lake was manager of the East Kootenay Supply Store in Windermere in the building which later became the general store of Pitts and Kimpton. In 1899, R.A. Kimpton was a merchant in Windermere and J.C. Pitts was a merchant in Donald.

In the late winter of 1897, Kimpton and Pitts of Donald, B.C., advertised a removal sale to clear out their whole stock of general merchandise. In the early spring of 1900 the firm of Kimpton and Pitts were operating as general merchants in Windermere and Donald. Later, in the early summer of 1900, Mr. R.A. Kimpton of the firm of Kimpton and Pitts of Windermere went to Donald with a number of

workmen to take down his house and prepare for its removal from Donald to Windermere. With the demolition of Donald from 1898 to 1900, some of the buildings were removed to such other areas as Beaver, Golden, Windermere and one building was moved as far south as Cranbrook, all went back into service in those areas.

In July 1899, it was reported that the firm of Kimpton and Pitts were operating the old established store in Windermere under Kimpton. Also of interest at this time is that Valley pioneer, Joe Lake has moved from Windermere as manager of the East Kootenay Supply Store, to Athalmer where he was the first to open a business. Prior to coming to Windermere, Joe Lake had lived a short while in Golden where he had a home. Prior to his arrival in Golden, he resided in Anthracite.

In those far off days when the construction of the building now known as the Kimpton and Pitts store was constructed a large basement was excavated on the north side to a depth of six or seven feet. That excavation stood there for many years and was always filled with water several feet deep which us children on our way to and from school enjoyed as we collected bottles, tin cans or anything that we could find to throw into that stagnant water. The present row of trees from the Kimpton store north to the White House were planted in 1911 or 1912 by Mr. Teddy Herring who worked for many years for Mr. Kimpton as a gardener and handy man.

Historically, the Kimpton and Pitts general store has served the area in many capacities over the years. After the new J.C. Pitts store was built the old building was used as a garage for the stage carrying the mail, from Athalmer to Windermere. During the early 1920's, the building served as a gas station and general garage for Mr. Lloyd Tegart. For many years while it was in service as a general store, it also served as the headquarters for the Windermere Valley Rifle Range Association where all their equipment was stored from week to week.

Note: The Pitts Store built in 1912 is now the Bob Hoffas Store and workshop. The First Kimpton and Pitts Store was torn down a few years ago.

Hal Bavin, Photographer from the Valley Echo Supplement, 1980

With so many talented people living in this Valley, it is difficult to select just one for particular mention, but Hal Bavin of Windermere deserves special recognition. His work as a photographer has been published in many magazines, journals and newspapers, and he has achieved an enviable reputation as one of British Columbia's finest scenic photographers.

He first arrived in the Columbia Valley in 1921, moving here from Vancouver with his parents, brothers and an uncle and aunt. They joined his grandparents who had settled here shortly before. Their first home was the old Morigeau log cabin, on the former Bev Harris farm, (currently Scott MacDonald's B&B) and then the Kimpton Ranch and for 24 years they lived on Sunshine Ranch. In those days it was an irrigated, flourishing farm, but today it is owned by the Government.

In 1942 Hal and Helen were married and took up residence in Windermere, where they raised two sons, John and Pat. Even at that time he was a keen photographer, and his love of the outdoors gave him endless opportunity to record much of the beauty of B.C. In 1958 at the World Exposition in Brussels, he had an exhibition of his colour transparencies and today his outstanding mountain scenes have appeared in publication across Canada. He is particularly well known for his contributions to Beautiful B.C., the government publication and B.C. Outdoors. Some of his black and white pictures have also appeared in Calgary and Vancouver newspapers.

Both Hal and Helen Bavin died a few years ago.

We are very pleased to have been given Hal Bavin's entire collection of slides and negatives by his sons, Pat and John and their families. We received them just this week. It will be a long process to catalogue the collection and we may be looking for volunteers next Fall when the work begins.