

VALLEY HISTORY

AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

BOX 2315, INVERMERE, V0A IK0 250-342-9769 August 2011



Esther and Walter Nixon 1913

Memories of earlier days in the Valley, when an active life caring for six children and keeping up with the comings and goings of her Big Game Guide husband were a full time job, are what keep up the spirit of Esther Nixon today.

Sitting in a wheel chair day after day, week after week, until it becomes year after year, can be a grueling experience. She has not walked for twelve years or more, but Mrs. Nixon does not speak of monotony or boredom or pain. In a soft voice she speaks of the days when the Nixon name was known the length and breadth of the Columbia Valley and far beyond its confines and she speaks of her children and grandchildren.

Esther Nixon lived in Ontario as a child, and in 1904 came to Parsons to visit her sister, Mrs. Tom Alton at Warm Springs Ranch. Walter

Nixon had been at Golden since 1900. They met, married in Golden in 1906 and came up the Columbia in one of Captain Armstrong's river-boats on their honeymoon to Windermere. They stayed at the Windermere Hotel, and the next day went across the lake in a canoe with old-timer Frank Nicholson, to visit Walters sister, Mrs. Albert White, at White's Dam.

Mrs. Nixon recalls that on her wedding trip they went from Windermere by horse and buggy to visit the Sam Brewers and found Mrs. Brewer peeling potatoes and singing gaily as she worked, pausing now and then to beat time with the knife in her hand.

The Nixon's put in some hardworking years while Walter was a Game Warden and while he was building his outfitting business. They lived for a time between 1914 and 1918 near Kootenay Crossing, years before there was any Banff-Windermere Highway. It was a hard life for a woman with young children and a busy one! There were cows to milk, pigs to feed, a horse to care for and the most difficult housekeeping conditions. Mrs. Nixon recalls that she was lucky because they had a lumber floor in the log cabin; other cabins of that type had floors constructed of light poles.

Sometimes Walter was away for a week or more at a time and there Mrs. Nixon would be, alone in the wilds, miles from any settlement. Once Walter cut his foot very badly with an axe while he was building a shed for the horse. He could not get to the doctor nor the doctor to him. Mr. T.A. Hope brought medicine from town (Invermere). "It was a worrisome time," Esther says casually now, but it is not hard to visualize the courage and stamina that a woman required to stick to that kind of a life.

Mrs. Nixon shows us a treasured possession a gold watch given to her husband by the Earl of Athlone when he was in the Valley on a hunting trip . Walter Nixon was his guide. The trip was a great success until tragedy struck when a young son and nephew of Walter Nixon's was drowned while swimming in Kinbasket Lake. (1930). While helping to locate the bodies , Walter lost his watch and the Earl of Athlone was aware of this. Later Walter received a handsome gold watch inscribed, "Walter Nixon from the Governor- General and Princess Alice, October 1943". The watch has been promised to one of Walter's five sons, only three of whom are still living.

The Nixon name was a tradition in the Valley for many years. Walter Nixon was a colorful personality, liked, admired and respected by all who knew him. His wife is proud of the tributes she has from many hunters who lived with him in the woods, the place where a man shows himself in his truest light. She is happy , too, that one of her grandsons shows the same inclination for the woods; for horse and saddle, hunting, guiding and the great art of being an outdoorsman. She sees in him the same qualifications that made the Nixon name a tradition.

Esther and Walter had 6 children.
 1907- son Gordon, 1909- Susie Owena,
 1911- T. Holbert, 1913- David Charlie, 1914
 - Arthur James, 1922- Walter Lea.

(Winn Weir Files)

1944 - Museum Files

"A large and well equipped doll's house was built and furnished by the members of the Junior Red Cross of the Athalmer/ Invermere School. The well built house contained four rooms and its own electric light system and was so completely furnished that the most fastidious doll family could move in at a moment's notice. The lucky ticket

was held by Miss Laura Palmason. Proceeds were sent to the Junior Red Cross headquarters where they will be used for the Crippled Children's Hospital. "

From Will Haylmore- December 7, 1956

" So glad you mentioned " Ptarmigan". I worked there a lot between spells whilst trapping. It registered 52 below one night. Traps would pinggg and fly to pieces so I would go to work for a week or so. Town was called Peterboro those days, before they renamed it Wilmer. In all my travels, I never met such a gathering of outstanding characters..... George Stark (Hotel), the Chamberlains, Bill and George (Hotel each), Quinlin, the horse shoer and Blacksmith, Jack Symonds, Boer War Vet..... and the handsomest and finest built man I have seen, also I think I am right in saying the strongest man I ever met..... Stability and honesty..... Nil ! Lie like a trooper ! And a thief, would steal anything ! Drank and hell gosh !! Yet loved and really liked by all. (I will write more of him anon.)

Do you know about a great barn on the Horse Thief Creek road ? Maybe it's still there ? The rawhide trail took off for the mine about a hundred yards further up the road. Red McIntosh was the Teamster. He hauled supplies from Wilmer to there, then the raw hide horses took over. One cold spell, Tom Starbird, the manager, asked me if I would make a trip or two with him. Snow was deep and a lot of trees would block the road. They bent over sometimes and would snap off and had to be cleared to let team and sleigh through.

One trip we were late. The team could only pull for a few yards and their nostrils would choke up with ice and they had to stop and stagger for breath. We had to beat the ice out of their nostrils. About a mile from the barn, Red said "You go ahead, Bill, light the fire in the heater and get some

barn now. Gosh, it was cold that night. Fog had closed down to timber top height and it was dark. Well, I got to the barn, and to my mild surprise, the big barn door was partly open. In I went and slammed the door shut. Instantly I was hurled across the velvet black space. The oiled sack I carried matches in (the old red topped sulphur matches..... China black matches, 100 to a block.) was knocked out of my hand. Any other matches on me were soaked. Pockets were saturated full of snow. I had closed the door on self and a huge black bear. When I got my breath back I sat up and felt around and could see nothing but utter blackness. Luckily, I had hit the ladder that went up to the hay and oat loft. Outside of being badly bruised, I seemed to be all right. Safely up there I could hear the brute of a thing thrashing around below me. Soon I heard the squeal of the sleigh. I yelled to Red to warn him but he could not hear me. I saw the glint of light from the stable lantern he was carrying as he partly opened the door. Instantly he , the lantern and the bear were buried in a smother of snow. The team too exhausted , never moved. Just stood there drooping heads down to the snow. A very short while later Red and the lantern reappeared. Anxiously his voice “ Bill, Bill, are you here ? ”

In no time at all, the big heater was stuffed with hay and coal oil and the coffee was on. Our ears, fingers and toes were nipped and lordy how it hurts when circulation takes over.

(Museum files)

THE BRITE SPOT
 INVERMERE
 HOME COOKED PIES A SPECIALTY
 1961
 MR. AND MRS. DAVE RAVEN

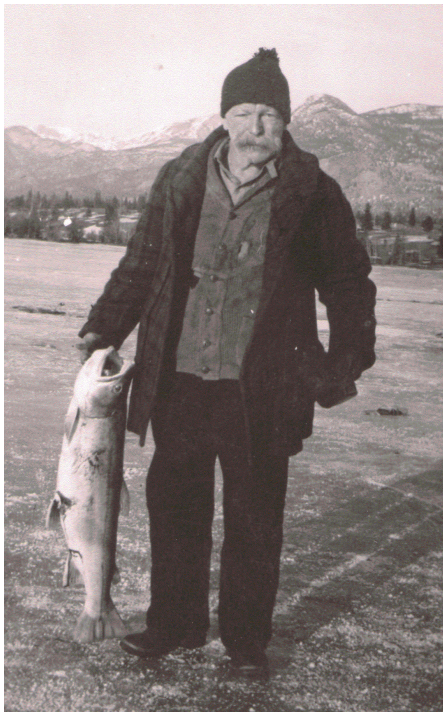
Emily Walker

Emily married Arthur Walker. They brought 5 children with them from England in May 1913. They first settled in Wilmer (Walker Point) but there was no water on the land so they resettled on Westside Road in old Paddy Ryan’s cabin. Their children were Arthur (Jack), Margaret, Tom, Katharine (Kitty), George and Elizabeth. The Walkers were the first pupils of the first school in Invermere.

Macleans on Climbing 1922

During the summer of 1920, Mr. Herbert W. Gleason, of Boston, Mass., a widely known mountain climber, and amateur photographer Mr. E.W. Harnden, of Boston, and Mr. C.D. Ellis, of Windermere, explored the Selkirks in the vicinity of Invermere making Paradise Mine (alt. 8000) their headquarters camp. “ It is”, said Mr. Gleason, “ among the finest mountain scenery unknown and unexplored. We have proved that the highest peaks in the Selkirk's are in this region and one member of the party, C.D. Ellis has carried an aneroid to the highest summit yet reached in the Selkirks, Mt. Hammond. (officially named Mt. Nelson in 1914 but know locally as Mt. Hammond at this time)

But there are at least 7 mountains in the vicinity of Mt. Hammond that out top it and I think some may reach over 13,000 ft. Harnden and I both agree that this is the greatest alpine country we have yet seen. ”



**Sinclair Craig
1930**

Born at Lanark, Ontario, Mr. Craig came west as a young man, first to Bowden, Alberta then to B.C. as a teamster for the North Star company near what is now Kimberley. He worked at Fort Steele for some time then came to the Windermere Valley by saddle horse. He had lived here for fifty years, following his trade as a blacksmith most of the time.

Mr. Craig also did considerable prospecting in the early days, being particularly interested in the White Cat property on Boulder Creek.

Mr. Craig was married twice, his first wife being a sister of his second wife. He had been remarkably active during his last years, his sight and hearing being exceptionally good for his years. He was renowned as a raconteur, especially with stories of the early days of the pioneers.

Sinclair Craig was a pioneer resident of Windermere and an ardent ice fisherman. Sinc came to the Windermere district in 1898 and operated a blacksmith shop near the Windermere Hotel, just north of the old stone building that housed the power unit for the Hotel. The stone building still stands. (2011).

From the time the lake froze over in the fall to breakup in the spring, Sinc would be fishing, almost daily, through a hole he chopped in the ice. He was after the big char that cruised the lake, and this picture, taken in the 1930's by the late Jack Bavin, attests to the fact that his elusive prey often ended up on the Craig's table.

The picture came from the album of Invermere resident Ray Crook, who is a son of a pioneer family. Ray has always been interested in Valley history and knew many of its old-timers first hand.

Message from the President

As the summer winds down, we thank all the wonderful volunteers that have helped at the museum during June, July and August. We also thank the wonderful crew that turned out for spring cleaning in May. What would we do without volunteers !

We are in the process of hiring for September. Noon to 4 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday. If you are looking for a job please let the president know. Or if you know someone looking for a short-time job, let us know.

Next general meeting is Friday, September 16th, 2 p.m. at the museum. It will be show & tell. If you have something to show, bring it along. If not, come along and we'll show you some of our newest artifacts.

Margaret Christensen

(Compiled by Sandy McKay)