

VALLEY HISTORY

AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

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James Lorenzo McKay

The McKay family came from Scotland and settled in Prince Edward Island. John McKay was born July 1, 1824 in Cavendish, P.E.I. There he married Mary Johnstone who was born in 1829 in New London, P.E.I. Mr. and Mrs. McKay had seven children : John (Jock) , Allan, James, Chalmer (Cham) , William David, Janet Emma, Barbara Elizabeth and Hallie Isabel. The family left P.E.I. and came west in 1881. They first went to Winnipeg and then to Moose Jaw.

In 1886, John McKay with three of his sons, Jock, James and Cham drove their cattle and horses from Moose Jaw. They went over the prairie and across the Rocky Mountains into the Columbia Valley. James L. McKay had bought 15,000 acres of Crown land in 1886 from the B.C. Government. The land went from Sinclair (Radium) to Luxor. It was named "Elk Park

Ranch". His father, John, took an acreage one mile north of Sinclair Creek. This property became known as Sinclair or 'Upper Ranch'. The other ranch at Luxor became 'Lower Ranch', which was homesteaded by Cham. These ranches made up the McKay Estate.

In the 1890's, Jim had his name changed legally to James Lorenzo McKay. This change was made as there were other MacKays in the Valley and they were having trouble with the mail and supplies. This inconvenience would at times delay the mail and supplies for weeks when left off at the wrong address, as transportation was by horse or boat in those days.

In 1887-88 Colonel Sam Steele was stationed at Fort Steele. He had brought over 200 head of horses to the Fort and they had to be wintered.

The Federal government called for tenders to feed the horses. Jim McKay gave a bid of \$10,000.00 and this bid was accepted but first Colonel Steele would have to inspect the haystacks to make sure that the person getting the contract had sufficient feed for the horses.

Jim didn't have sufficient hay to winter his own stock, so he employed a number of Indians and they built tripods on the sloughs and covered these with slough hay to make them look like large hay stacks.

When the Colonel arrived, he was taken on a tour of inspection, but they made sure he didn't ride too close to the haystacks for he may have detected the framework under the hay.

The contract was awarded to Jim. When the horses arrived, they were turned out on

the open range at the Sinclair Ranch. It so happened that it was an open winter and the horses stayed in good shape and didn't need any extra feed. The sloughs where the tripods were built are to this day known as the "Police Sloughs". Jim McKay went east and purchased \$10,000.00 worth of stock, his first good start.

From 1887-1898, Mr. and Mrs., with Miss Hallie, lived with the three boys on the Upper Ranch. This was their home for eleven years and was the ranching headquarters for the three boys. Those eleven years were busy and active, with improvements to the land, seeding, harvesting and looking after the stock.

In 1898 John McKay sold his ranch, the Upper Ranch to the Elk Park Co. Ranch. James Lorenzo McKay was the owner. Mr. and Mrs. McKay retired to Victoria.

James L. McKay was eighteen years old when he came west and bought the Elk Park Ranch. He married Miss Anne Harper in Golden in 1900 and they made the Upper Ranch their home. For the birth of their children, Mrs. McKay went to Golden traveling on the river Steamer. Harold, William, Dorothy, Marion, Lionel, Gordon and Marguerite were the family.

In 1901 a big new house was built, an Eaton House, "Gingerbread model". It cost \$10,000.00. There was a big housewarming when they moved into this house. It lasted from six at night until six in the morning and everyone from up and down the valley was there. Visitors were always welcomed.

James L. McKay had the largest cattle ranch in the Kootenays, running 1,000 head plus wintering 300 horses for the Government. He operated butcher shops in Golden and Athalmer and supplied all the meat from the Upper Ranch. He also was becoming interested in mining, logging and development of other properties.

In 1911, because schooling for the children was becoming a problem, he sold the Upper

Ranch, part of the Elk Park Ranch to the Columbia Valley Syndicate, situated in Kelowna, with an office in Edgewater operating as Columbia Valley Orchards. Jim sold nearly all his holdings, the Ranch and all the stock. He moved the family to Athalmer, taking over the Windsor Hotel. This hotel was owned by Charlie Cartwright and was closed only a few weeks before when they lost the liquor license. The McKay family lived in this hotel until a bungalow was built on the banks of the Columbia River.

From 1911-1915, the ranch was the property of Columbia Valley Orchards Co. Ltd. In 1923 it became Columbia Valley Ranches under Dr. Geddes, Herbert Geddes and Dr. Thompson.

Sometimes the Upper Ranch house was vacant and sometimes it was rented out. Up until 1946, the upper Ranch was leased to various ranchers. At the time of the sale in 1946 to Kirk Christmas Tree Co., the ranch was leased to Carl Knudel, and he herded sheep on the ranch. Bill Atsma had the ranch and he ran dairy cows. Logan and Sylvia Atwood called the ranch home 1947-1959. It was a cattle ranch and they raised Herefords. From 1960 until 1986, Jim and Hubert Statham leased the ranch and ran 300 head of cattle. Tom Statham managed the ranch from 1986 to 1991. Jason Statham took over from 1991 to 2000. Schickendanze bought the property in 1999.

(Jock McKay Files)

The Columbian Echo— 1913

Tremendous progress is being made in the erection of J. McCroskie's new meat market which will shortly be open for business. Mr. McCroskie is on his way home with two carloads of live beef and a large number of live hogs. There should be no lack of support for this new enterprise; the general cry all over the valley for a long time has been "We can't get beef!" Well now you will be able to get it, and lots of it!

Joseph Young

Joseph Young was one of the real pioneers of the valley. He arrived in British Columbia in 1884 and worked for Col. James Baker at St. Joseph's Prairie (now Cranbrook). I knew Mr. Young quite well in 1918 when I was working for J.W.Crawford at the then famous Fairmont Hot Springs Ranch.

As the years roll along it is well to look back on the part these early pioneers played in the opening up and development of the valley. Looking back to the year 1898 we find the names of John McKay of Sinclair (Radium), Joseph Bullman of Canal Flats and Joseph Young of Fairmont, acting as gazetted fence viewers within that portion of the East Kootenay Electoral District, known as Windermere.

While working at Fairmont Hot Springs during 1918-1919, I often admired the heavy log fence along the East Kootenay Wagon road which surrounded the property of Mr. Young's and the enormous amount of work required to build such a fence. Years later, and as a tribute to Mr. Young, I found this report which speaks for itself and the work he did as follows:

Year, 1898— One of the nicest ranches in the Upper Columbia Valley is that owned by Mr. J. Young at Fairmont. An area of 150 acres where he breeds horses and cattle. Another thing about this farm that strides the visitor is the apple-pie order in which everything is kept, gates, fences and buildings. He has just completed the erection along the East Kootenay Wagon Road, on one of the finest fences to be seen in the area.

(1973 Letter from H.E.Richardson)

Frank Richardson-1963

(As I saw it 50 years ago)

Fifty years ago, before the railway came through, Athalmer was a fast growing town. The old Columbia river Lumber Co. had sold to the largest timber outfit in Vancouver which was controlled by Americans. As headquarters for the Golden mill and office, Athalmer was the supply depot and office for the logging operations which were greatly extended for this upper country. The company had an office, three large warehouses and a set of stables lining the river banks. There were three logging camps with 75 men in each, Milligans, A. White and J. Hostler. Joe Hanna was Walking Boss.

All supplies came up the Columbia by steamboat in the spring and summer and the camps were supplied by four horse teams coming in daily bringing hay, oats and groceries.

In the spring when the water rose in the creeks, logs from the camps on Horsethief and Toby were dumped in and were driven down to the Columbia to the mill in Golden. The steamboats were operated by Captain Armstrong at first, then by Capt. Alex Blakley and then by Capt. John Blakley. Everyone looked forward to hearing the old steamboat round the bend giving a signal to open the bridge which was equipped with the necessary machinery.

There was a general store at Athalmer, Lake & Co., one harness maker, three livery stables, three hotels, a poolroom and a barber-shop, a jewelry store and a number of residents.

Logging was all done by horses and heavy logging sleighs. Milligan's Camp was built to house 75 men. They logged for two years and built a good road and rock cut across the K2 Ranch. Owing to two mild winters,

it was impossible to keep a road for sleighs. The road was iced again and again but went out as fast as it was made. Those logs were piled up on the K2 and maybe some of them are there yet.

There were lots of convivial evenings at the Coronation Hotel and the haunting strains of "Sweet Adeline" and "In the Evening by the Moonlight" drifted through the doorway. There was a good mixed party with one or two good tenors and a baritone. When that floated out the marble doorway, you could forget Georgina Davis and Madame Patti. You found your way around with a stable lantern as lights were scarce. Sometimes some of the adventurous ladies took a walk past the Coronation and the boys chased them. When they got away from the light, they stopped running.

A football field was cleared and sports were held there. This was on Warner's Lumber Yard. (North Star Lumber 2012). Lumber company teams pulled out the roots and bank boys and others did the work.

On the hill was Canterbury (now Invermere), an excellent place to exercise our horses and races were held there once a year. On the advent of the land company, Irrigated Fruit Lands, the spot was promoted to Invermere.

A very fine rink was built with room for three curling rinks and hockey matches between Athalmer and Invermere were well fought battles. There were lots of dances in the schoolhouse where we had a great time. That is the place for a real old square dance and it was done to the King's taste.

During the summer a government dredge worked on the river and with the steamboats working their way over the sandbars at low water kept the river open and in good shape. Athalmer was never bothered with high water and the lumber company stables were in the lowest places. In 1914 the railway came through. The old days were gone forever.

Too bad we will not see them again.

Introduction to JD Jeffery (Curator)

As you know my name you may also recognize me as having had my picture on the cover of the Pioneer newspaper recently. Now, let me tell you a little about myself. I am recently a new acquisition to the museum as of February this year and have enjoyed the experience so far.

I came to the valley in the mid 1980's with my mother and spent the last two years of high school here. I moved to Calgary and attended SAIT to get my diploma in Library and Information Technology. Being a "happy techie", I worked in my field for over 20 years learning many things and adapting to the changes that libraries are having to go through.

In 2010, I returned to visit a friend in the valley. The feeling like I was coming home and getting a big hug was so strong that I made up my mind to come back. I moved back here in September 2010.

I took up an invitation to help with the museum cleanup last May and loved the things I saw. When the invitation to apply for a position at the museum came up, I jumped at the opportunity and hoped for the best. It is now May 2012 and I have been here for 3 months. I enjoy getting my nose dusty exploring things and finding out the history of the valley. I get to share what I have learned with people coming in and they even get to share their stuff that fills in the blanks that I don't know.

I think I have found my niche and want to invite you to come see me at the museum on Tue. or Fri. from 12-4. I am always wanting to see something old (the older the better) and learn the history it has to tell, so come introduce yourself and see what is new.... old.... new. The museum is a fun place to be !