

History of Beaver Valley & Pend d'Oreille Districts

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Fruitvale Women's Institute – published 1958

Settlement of Fruitvale...

In 1812, David Thompson followed the Columbia River from the present International Boundary to the Arrow Lakes and became the first white man to pass the mouth of Trail Creek. He was followed before long by the fur traders who piled the river in their long canoes, trading with the Indians camped on the flats by the river bank, and carrying their furs to the posts of the North West Company.

It was to be another half century, however, before a permanent settlement appeared in this area. This was Fort Shepherd, which was built by the Hudson's Bay Company after the Oregon Treaty made the 49th Parallel the dividing line between Canada and the United States, threatening the company with heavy duty on goods going to its post in Fort Colville.

By 1857, a dwelling house and three storehouses had been built and the fort was completed in the next two years.

During the years gold mining was carried on spasmodically along the Pend d'Oreille and the first steamboat to pass Trail Creek appeared in 1865. In the same year the Dewdney Trail was completed. This trail was intended by James Douglas, British Columbia's first governor, to be an all Canadian route from the coast to the interior for the benefit of miners and settlers, and joined the water route at the mouth of Trail Creek.

Now adventurers were arriving by river and land route, lured by the tales of gold in the mountains and along the river banks. In 1890, the Centre Star and Le Roi claims were located and a growing stream of prospectors wound its way to Rossland. By this time the Dewdney Trail had fallen into disuse and all traffic was by boat, and in Trail the first permanent structure was built by Col. E. S. Topping and Mr. Frank Hannah.

Just two years later, in the spring of 1892, Mrs. John Reith and her family arrived at the Pend d'Oreille, having travelled from Huron County via Chicago, St. Paul and Winnipeg to Revelstoke and then by the steamer Lytton. Mrs. Reith and six of her children landed on the rocks on the river bank and her son, William, recalls that she remarked later that this was the most lonesome moment of her life. Anyone who has ever stood by the roaring waters of the Pend d'Oreille looking up at these towering tree-clad slopes could well imagine how it must have seemed to her, alone there with her children.

Presently, two men appeared and took them to a tent, recently pitched by the Kootenay Hydraulic Mining Co. who were just beginning a placer mining development on the river. After lunch at the tent, they started up the sand bank, north from the river, at almost a 45 degree climb

and reached the old Dewdney Trail, about half a mile north. They then went east on the trail to a cabin on Lime Creek, where they camped until their own cabin was built. A nine-month-old boy and a three-year-old girl were carried by two men up the steep hills on the way to the cabin.

John Reith, who had come west in 1891 in search of a homestead, had staked a pre-emption (320 acres) three miles up the river Pend d'Oreille in the early fall of 1891. While his family was journeying to the Pend d'Oreille, he took a boat down the Columbia to Colville Valley, purchased about 30 head of cattle, and started north. He reached his family about a month after their arrival having had to hire Indians to help him swim the Columbia River twice in order to pass the Pend d'Oreille. That summer, Mrs. Reith cooked for her family by campfire and baked bannocks in frying pans. At first their floors were earth, but by winter they had rough lumber for floors by peeling cedar trees and turning the smooth side up. The older folks had a feather tick and the children slept on fir boughs. Mr. William Reith recalls that he and his brothers and sisters enjoyed the life in the new surroundings and that they had ample food, venison, fish, milk and butter being plentiful. They had a warm cabin for winter and everyone was happy.

In 1892, Matt Hill also arrived in the Pend d'Oreille and with his sister Alice, lived there until his death about two years ago.

There were four large ranches opened up about this time in the Pend d'Oreille, those belonging to Mr. George Ellis and Pietro Moresi as Mr. Hill's and Mr. Reith's. After that, the land was divided in 160-acre plots.

Meanwhile, the placer mining company continued. A sawmill was placed north of Arthur Wray's present house and a ditch was built from 12-mile creek, picking up 9-mile and the 7-mile, using the water to hydraulic for gold just below 7-mile creek. This venture was not a success, so they later put a wing dam into the Pend d'Oreille just below Matt Hill's property and this power drove pumps which furnished a good water power. The cut which they made on the river side can still be seen. The results of this, however, were also disappointing and in 1893 a depression caused the company to "fold up."

The Boundary area at this time was a boom area, with much placer mining being carried on, and at Waneta, Mr. Fred Adie, Sr., and Mr. Bob Keldy built and operated the Fort Shepherd Hotel on the south side of the river. Isabel Reith was the first school teacher in Waneta from 1893 to 1894, and her brother believes this to have been the first school in the vicinity. Records show that the first school in Trail was opened in December, 1895. John Reith was the first postmaster at Waneta, with his daughter Elizabeth as assistant and they also operated the first general store.

In 1893, the steel railway bridge was built for the Nelson and Fort Shepherd Railway and trains were getting through that winter, but in 1894, heavy flood waters washed away the approaches to the railway bridge and service was disrupted for a time.

Of this time it is recalled by old timers that flood waters forced the temporary evacuation of the hotel owner's family. Business at the bar was unaffected.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, lumber camps operated around the site of the present Ross Spur. One of these was the company of Ross and Archibald. Other early residents of this

area were the Le Pages, Andrew Park, and the Bells, (some of whom still live here). In the winter of 1898, the Reith family had a wood camp at Ross Spur and delivered 1200 cords of dry tamarac wood, cut in two foot lengths, on the railway right-of-way at two dollars per cord. This was the last winter the railway fired its boilers with wood.

Now that the West Kootenay was linked with both the Pacific Coast and Eastern Provinces, people began to stream into the area. But now there was a difference. No longer were they adventurers, prospectors, miners or lumbermen, but settlers with their families, in search of homesteads. Inevitably, there was much land speculation and some people fared very badly, the lands they bought being widely scattered, making the acquisition of the elements of a civilized community such as schools and churches impossible.

Fruitvale, it seems, was better provided for than most, for although some tracts of land were sold earlier, most did not go on the market until the whole area had been subdivided, and roads and bridges connecting the properties, built.

The land on which most of Fruitvale stands was Crown Land, granted to the Nelson and Fort Shepherd Railway Co., whose line was completed in 1895, and from then on immediately operated by the Great Northern Railway Co.

The first official record of transference of these lands is contained in the survey records of the Surveys and Mapping branch of the Department of Lands and Forests where a survey plan signed by Mr. A.H. Green, B.C.L.S., dated July 2nd, 1907, and another December, 1907, also signed by Mr. Green show Mr. Frederick L. Hammond as owner. Mr. Hammond was apparently the president of the Kootenay Orchid Association which sold the subdivisions to the settlers.

The land was divided into lots of from 5 to 25 acres, with a small town site containing about 150 lots 40 by 100 on either side of the railway track set aside for the future town. In geographical names records, both "Fruitvale" and "Beaver" are listed as railway stations in 1909 but indications are that they are one and the same, although the original location of one may have been changed slightly. Both are described as being about 50 miles from Nelson.

"Fruitvale" was widely advertised in the Nelson area and in Eastern Canada, particularly Ontario, and the first settlers arrived in the early summer of 1907. Some of the men who surveyed the land bought spots for themselves and on the 21st of May 1907, six men stepped off the train at Fruitvale. They were R.J. Bush, Frank Clark, Carcy Bush, Tom Bush, F.L. Hammond, and set to work to slash roads and build a log house for the company which was used as a temporary shelter for new arrivals and later became known as the Model Ranch, when the company's office was moved to J. Hyslop's house. The Model Ranch is now owned by Mr. Quattrin, and the Hyslop house is the old Shorting house, and once stood where the new house is now.

The Bush family first occupied the Model Ranch and the Bush boys would set lamps at the station and the creek to guide the new arrivals as trains mostly arrived after dark, 3:00 am from Nelson and around midnight from Northport. It was not long before a boarding house, hotel and general store were built by Mr. J.N. Hammond.

Fruitvale grew swiftly then, everywhere could be heard the ring of the axe and canvas glinted through the trees as new settlers put up first tents and then more permanent houses.

Arthur Mears of Arcola built his hardware store, starting with four walls and a tent for roof; M.B. Williams opened a store, Davis Bros. were the first blacksmiths and Englund Bros. put in a small sawmill.

The first school was opened in 1907 and the teacher from 1907 to 1908 was Mr. Tom Henderson, who was paid a salary of \$60 per month. Mr. John Young, Mr. J.H. Hammond and Mr. Arthur Baxter were the trustees.

A Post Office was also opened, on December 1st, with Mr. J.N. Hammond as first post master.

By the beginning of 1908, 2000 acres of land had been sold to 200 different families of settlers.

Fruitvale was on its way, but the way was not easy. The land had to be cleared and the fruit trees planted, houses had to be built, families fed, and property paid for. Most families lived first in tents or hastily constructed shacks and built permanent houses later. Small pieces of land were cleared and planted, the areas of cultivation gradually increasing. Grouse and game were plentiful in the woods and old timers tell how it was nothing to have 100 fish to a catch in Beaver Creek.

Many of the men worked part of the year on roads and on the railroad, some as far away as Spokane. Wages were about 15 cents an hour with a nine hour day in winter and a ten hour day in summer. A trip to Trail meant going by Sparwood (now Columbia Gardens) wagon road and then by boat across the Columbia.

Some items from a local newspaper in the fall of 1907 remind us of some general aspects of the times, for example, recession conditions were apparently prevalent and copper prices had dropped. Such notables of the era as Rudyard Kipling and Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria were still very much alive. Rudyard Kipling paid a visit to the B.C. coast in October of 1907. In the fashion pages the following description of what was called "an appropriate calling costume for the bride" was given. "The costume was made of grey broadcloth trimmed with Persian Lamb bands. The fronts of the redingote 'cut away' to display a front skirt panel elaborate in applique decoration of fine braid and silk floss. The under blouse of cream cluny lace and the bratelles of Persian trimming. A hat of grey velvet, trimmed with pansies, whit wings, velvet and loop, grey gloves completed the costume."

Some large ranches were now being established, notably those of the Muir Bros. and Jack Buchanan, who brought in goats, sheep and other cattle. By 1911, a broom factory had been added, owned by Scheidler and Whittemore and Varseveldt's Sawmill, which is still a local landmark, though the location has been changed, A new school was also built, where the present primary school stands. Around this time too, the "Bayswater Boys" enter the scene. This group, composed mostly of Remittance men from England were remembered by all old timers and spoken of with a mixture of amazement, amusement and affection. To them they give much of the credit for the reputation for sports which Fruitvale enjoyed, and tell tales of them, in white flannels, playing cricket on the open space by the railway, in front of the stores. At this time the 24th of May Sports Days were highlights of the year.

In 1915, fire destroyed most of the business section of the town, but most of it was rebuilt on its original site, an exception being Arthur Mears' Hardware Store which was moved to the original school location, and the Post Office. At the time of the fire, the hotel which had been owned for a time by Mrs. Kidd (then Mrs. Beamer), belonged to the Mallards, whose daughter, Mabel, was the child born in Fruitvale.

By now there was a wagon road to Trail, using more or less the present route, and farmers were taking their produce to Trail though by all reports the road presented some formidable obstacles. No doubt the summer was comparatively uneventful, but old timers have many tales of axle-deep ruts in spring and fall and Mr. A.C. Webster remembers taking a sleigh as far as Merry's Flats (now Glenmerry) where he borrowed a wagon from a friend and struggled through the mud to Trail.

With the end of the 1914-18 war, came a period of prosperity and high prices. Mrs. Stirling, an early resident of the Pend d'Oreille, remembers in 1918 her husband paid \$18 for two bags of seed potatoes, which he considered a staggering price, but he was no less surprised when in July he was paid \$15 per sack for his crop. At this time Fruitvale took another spurt in population and many new organizations came into being. There was already a Farmer's Institute, which had received its charter in 1913, the first president being Mr. S. Brewster, and the first Fall Fair was held in 1911.

The oldest organization which is still active is the Women's Institute, which began officially in 1921, with Mrs. B.C. Affleck, whose husband was one of the original surveyors, as its first president, although ladies had met together since 1910. Their first aim was to arouse interest in a cemetery for the growing community and for this they worked for several years, choosing, clearing and fencing the proposed site. It was certified suitable by the medical officer of health in April of 1924.

There was a group of Scouts started in 1924-25, with Mr. B.C. Affleck as first Scout Master and in 1932, Mrs. D. Knowler organized a group of Guides.

During depression years the Fruitvale Social Club was very active, with dances, box socials, badminton, and various social events, mostly in the old Community Hall which was built in 1919.

With the advent of the Second World War, many of the men went overseas, the smelter grew and more men were needed. After the war, with new roads, more cars, and the building of the Waneta Dam, more people came to live in Fruitvale and gradually the area became less of a farming area in 1946 and many new homes have been built in the last decade. A fine new Elementary - Junior High School and large Memorial Hall are outstanding buildings.

After the village was incorporated in 1952 the wooden sidewalks were replaced by cement. The Cemetery Co. was disbanded and the site turned over to council. The Recreation Park was also turned over to the Village by the Fruitvale Recreation Society. Road equipment has been purchased, street lighting improved, and the Village Council is presently investigating the possibility of a sewage system.

In the business section, stores have been modernized, new ones built, and modern Neon lights blink brightly in the evenings.

This scene, so familiar to us today, is vastly different to that which greeted our pioneers, 50 years ago.

“Let us look backward, backward through the years,
And pay our tributes to the pioneers
Not to the statesmen great, whose names we see
Printed upon the page of history;
But to the ones who crossed this nationwide,
And wrote with deeds across the countryside.
Where stands this valley smiling, fair and mild,
They found a forest stern and grim and wild.”

Churches...

St. John's Anglican Church

St. John's Anglican Church was dedicated on November 20th, 1913, but services had been held before that in homes or other suitable premises. Archdeacon Graham held many of these services and encouraged interest in the building of a church.

The first minister after the church's dedication was Rev. H. H. Gilles. Other ministers were Rev. H. R. Wragg, Rev. N. D. Larmouth, Rev. W. J. Silverwood, Rev. Beames and Rev. Catchpole. In 1946, Archdeacon Resker began services here and was mainly responsible for starting the Fruitvale-Salmo parish. A manse was then built by the congregation and Rev. W. Edington came as a lay reader and while here was ordained a priest.

The present minister is the Rev. J. C. Davenport.

The first meeting of the Women's Auxiliary was on July 18th, 1912. Officers were: President, Mrs. Bush; Vice-President, Mrs. Brewster; Secretary, Mrs. Neilson, and Treasurer, Mrs. Jack Varseveldt.

St. Rita's Church

St. Rita's Church was built in 1937 under the supervision of Father Gerald Murphy of Nelson, now deceased. The first four families were, Frank Kalusic, Tony Yonker, Ed McHale and Dan Murray.

There were a number of missionary priests until five years ago when Father Frank was stationed as a resident priest. Membership has now grown to approximately 70 families.

St. Paul's United Church

Previous to July 1939, when St. Paul's was built, United Church people were supplied by ministers from Trail, Rossland and Nelson. At that time services were held in the Anglican Church. A ladies Aid was functioning as well as a Union Sunday School. A self-sustaining East Trail-Fruitvale pastoral charge was formed and the first minister was Rev. J. L. Clerihue. Other ministers of the pastoral charge were Rev. D. M. Perley and Rev. D. W. More. In 1947, a stained glass memorial window was installed by the Junior Women's Guild assisted by the Ladies Aid, the Sunday School and individual friends. In 1952, because of the very large area and increasing number of people to serve, it was decided to divide the pastoral charge into two separate charges. East Trail Church became one, and Fruitvale, Salmo, Emerald Mine, Beaver Falls, Montrose and other points became a second charge. A manse was purchased for the residence of the minister and the Rev. S. B. Boyle became Fruitvale minister and Rev. More remained in East Trail. Rev. T. Karpoff succeeded Rev. S. B. Boyle and the present minister is Rev. L. C. Hooper.

A C.G.I.T. group was first organized by Mrs. J. L. Clerihue in 1939 and Mrs. W. Veitch took it over in 1942 until 1945. In 1949, Mrs. Veitch again organized a group which she had until taking over the Explorers in 1950. Since then, Mrs. Fred Haines has been their leader.

Trinity Lutheran Church

Trinity Lutheran Church was organized as a congregation on January 12, 1932, with the Reverend E. A. Biberdorf as its first pastor.

The first church council consisted of: Mr. Andrew Nelson, President; Mr. Carl Wagner, Secretary; and Mr. B. Johnson, Treasurer.

The present church building, which was built by the members of the congregation, was dedicated to the glory of God also in the year 1932.

The charter members of the congregation were: A. E. Wagner, B. E. Johnson, W. Nipkow, C. J. Wagner, E. A. Biberdorf, J. Wallgreen and A. Nelson.

Of these first members only Mr. Andrew Nelson is still active with the congregation today.

Since its organization in 1932, Trinity Lutheran Church has been served by eight pastors, the present pastor being W. G. Krenz, who resides in Trail.

Today, the congregation numbers 77 baptized members and 47 communicant members and has a Sunday School of 37 children. Mr. Francis Fricke is the chairman of the board.

Schools...

The first school was opened in 1907. The teacher from 1907 – 1908 was Mr. Tom Henderson and there were 19 girls and 9 boys present. The trustees were, Mr. John Young, Mr. J. H. Hammond and Mr. Arthur Baxter.

In 1910, a school was opened on the site of the present primary school. At this time, the school also served as a community hall. In 1921, another room was added and basements under both rooms, where a coal furnace was installed.

By 1936, the school had again outgrown its quarters and two more rooms were added with a small teacher's room which in turn was soon needed as a classroom. Soon, even the basements were being used for classrooms and when Fruitvale came under the newly-formed School District No. 11 (Trail) plans were made for a new elementary-junior high school which was completed in 1949 and officially opened in October, 1952. Mr. E. J. Henry is the present Principal and he has an enrollment of over 640 pupils.

Organizations...

Fruitvale Fair Association

The first fair was held in Fruitvale in 1911 and a Fair Association was formally organized in 1914 under the auspices of the Farmers' Institute. Its first President was Mr. S. Brewster. In 1943, a Calf Club was formed by the efforts of Mr. Louis DeBruyn and Mr. A. Lamond. This club worked in close co-operation with the Fair Association until 1954, when owing to the changing economy the fair was forced to drop the livestock section.

In 1952, when the Farmers' Institute felt that due to the pressure of other business, it could not carry on with the fair; the present Fair Board was organized. The first President was Mr. Harvey Dilling; Vice-President, Mrs. C. Rogers, and Secretary-Treasurer, Mrs. C. H. Patterson.

Under the present association, various new sections have been added to replace, as far as possible, the livestock section.

Women's Institute

The Fruitvale Women's Institute was incorporated in 1921 with 25 charter members. Two of these, Mrs. A. C. Webster and Mrs. D. C. Mason, are still members. From the beginning they had the welfare of the community at heart, their first project the erection of a community stable near the community hall for the convenience of those in outlying areas. They were instrumental in getting the community a cemetery. They organized public meetings which saw the beginnings of the Fruitvale Recreation Society and the Parent-Teacher Association. They have always taken an interest in the children, instigating hot lunches at the school, organizing sewing classes and garden contests. In 1937, they completed and opened their own hall. This was sold in 1951, the proceeds of the sale being donated towards the construction of the Memorial Hall.

Fruitvale Parent-Teacher Association

The first meeting of the Fruitvale P.T.A. was held on March 26th, 1945, with the following officers being elected. President, Mr. R. Leckett; Vice-President, Mr. S. Ellison;

Secretary, Mrs. S. Ellison; Treasurer, Mrs. D. Knowler. There was a membership of 93 during 1945-46.

The Friendly Club

This club was formed in 1936 and meets on a purely social basis. Two rules were made at the start. 1. That there was to be no harmful gossip, and 2. That only two items of food were to be served. Original members were Mrs. Dan McLean, Mrs. Tom Grieve, Mrs. Tom Cole, Mrs. W. Veitch and Mrs. Harold Anderson. Early members were Mrs. B. E. Johnson, Mrs. F. M. Barrett and Mrs. J. Sadler. The club limits its membership to 15 feeling that this is a maximum for the average home.

Senior Citizens

In April of 1957, nine elderly men and women met together and decided to continue to meet regularly for mutual companionship and entertainment. The present membership is about 22 and they have been entertained by showing of pictures on a screen, a play let by the Junior Drama Group, readings, games, sing-songs and story-telling of olden days. There are four members 80 years of age.

Canadian Legion

The veterans of the Second World War, on returning to civilian life, joined with World War I veterans and formed the Canadian Legion Branch No. 196 and with them the ladies formed the Ladies Auxiliary. Their first presidents were Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Nuttall. They own their own hall which is rented to other organizations and individuals for their functions and which they have continued to improve over the years.

Fruitvale Recreation Commission

The Fruitvale Recreation Commission was organized in 1953 under the Community Programs Branch of the Department of Education, Victoria. The advisory council consists of one delegate from each community organization, one from the school staff and one from the village council. The advisory council elects from its members the commissioners, who fulfil the duties normally allotted to an executive. The Department of Education supplies grants, literature and films to commissions wishing them and holds leadership schools.

Square dancing and drama were encouraged by the commission, and they have purchased for community use a public address system. Mr. John Newton was its first chairman.

Welfare Society

The Welfare Society collects and distributes donated funds to welfare and community needs, eliminating the need of numerous tag days and individual requests for assistance.

Scouts and Guides

A group of Scouts was organized in 1924-25, Mr. B. C. Affleck being first Scoutmaster, and in 1932 Mrs. D. Knowler organized a group of Guides. Both these groups lapsed for a time

but were reorganized in about 1935, with Mr. F. Dunn leading the Scouts and Mrs. Ellison the Guides.

The Fruitvale Volunteer Fire Dept.

The Fire Department was started in 1948. They have their own building and through the years have modernized and added to their equipment.

Service Groups and Fraternal Societies

The Pythian Sisters were instituted in 1952 with Mrs. Elizabeth Sims first Most Excellent Chief. The Knights of Pythias were formed in 1955 with Mr. Wilfred Deadmarsh as its first Chancellor Commander.

The Rotary Club was presented with their charter on September 23rd, 1954. Rotary Anns were formed in 1956.

Mr. Alfred Nuttal was the first President of the Fruitvale Rotary Club and Mrs. B. Agostinelli was first President of the Rotary Anns.

The Fruitvale A.O.T.S. is sponsored by the United Church and draws its membership from many walks of life and denominations. It was formed in 1948 with Mr. Alex Graham as its first President.

All these service and fraternal groups render a great service to the communities in which they function in their willingness to support community efforts in every way possible.

Organizations which are not now active, but which played a considerable part in the growth and improvement of the village and the valley and are therefore due a place in any history of this area are the Farmer's Institute, the Fruitvale Ratepayers' Association and the Fruitvale Recreation Association, later known as the Recreation and Projects Society.