



Jasper-Yellowhead Museum & Archives

Letter from Mr. Fred W. Hindle

This past Tuesday, my dedicated volunteer, Pat Bell, came intriguing letter that was found while going through old information files. The letter was addressed to Mrs. M.L. Peterson, from Mr. Fred W. Hindle. Constance Peterson, a local, who not

only took a great interest in preserving Jasper's history and spent much of her life researching and preserving Jasper stories. Mrs. Peterson, a founding member of the Jasper Yellowhead Historical Society, helped to establish the Jasper Yellowhead Museum and Archives. As acting historian for the society, and keeper of society records, Mrs. Peterson made contact and kept extensive correspondence with all sorts of people connected to the area. She was vigilant and collected much in the way of photographs and documents pertaining to various aspects of the Jasper story. Without further ado, here is Mr. Hindle's letter for your enjoyment:

July 22, 1973

Dear Mrs. Peterson, I must apologize for the delay in answering you letter, which caught me at a busy time, however, here goes:

I started to work with the G.T.P [Grand Trunk Pacific] Railway Engineering Department on the location survey some 20 miles east of where Edson is now (there was nothing there then – except muskeg [swamp or marsh] and there was sure plenty of that, we even had to use snowshoes in July to enable us to walk on it, otherwise we would sink to our waist or further). We made a preliminary survey of the proposed location of Edson yard tracks and camp but were living in 14 FT square wall tents. We had around fifteen men or so saddle and packhorses. We moved camp on the average, about every four or five days and if I remember rightly it took us more than two months to reach Pochontas, where we made camp and, incidentally stayed at this camp longer than usual, as we noted that when we took water from a near by creek for cooking and drinking purposes, that the water was decidedly warm and had a sulphur [sic] taste. So we decided to investigate, so early one morning we started off and followed the creek up stream. It was pretty tough going, as there was practically no trail. Except once in a while we would hit a deer trail, which helped a little, but the dead falls were something fierce; however, we finally reached the spot where the present Miette swimming pool is located and discovered the source of the warm water

with the sulphur [sic] taste – We had found a hot water sulphur [sic] spring, which as it bubbled form the ground was too hot to drink, until it had been mixed with the ice cold water of the creek. Indians had built a log dam across the creek some distance below the hot water spring, which formed a primitive swimming pool in just about the same location as the present pool. Needless to say we tried out the pool and found the temperature of the water just right. As you no doubt are aware there is quite a fair sized area of fairly flat land on the left side of the present roadway, a short distance before the swimming pool is reached, so we made a rough survey of this area and also a sketch plan (map) showing the location of the hot water spring and the flat area of land already referred to and we sent the report and map to our engineering headquarters in Winnipeg. Sometime afterwards we learned that it was proposed to construct a swimming pool and also a hotel on the flat area of ground already mentioned. The hotel was to be built on similar lines to the Banff Springs hotel. However, this somewhat ambitious scheme never materialized as the First World War broke out before anything could be done, although the swimming pool was constructed later. After leaving Pochontas, our next stop was at Henry House, where we made our camp, in the vicinity of "Old man" Swift's homestead where we stayed until our headquarters camp was completely constructed at Fitzhugh (which at the time was nothing much more than a name). Sadly, shortly after we had made camp, one of the Swift children died and the problem arose as to who would conduct the burial service. There was no priest or minister of any religion available and Swift's wife who was a Métis from St. Albert, north of Edmonton, was insisting on a Roman Catholic burial, as she was a RC. Swift himself was understood to be a Presbyterian, but never actually said so. So the question was what to do. It so happened that we had a guy form our party who was religiously inclined (which was quiet a novelty for the engineering dept) and he volunteered to head the burial service, Swift's wife being Roman Catholic had a RC prayer book, a Presbyterian prayer book was rustled up from God knows where and the guy on our party had a church of England prayer book, so to satisfy all concerned, he read the burial service ritual form each of the three prayer books so everybody was happy. (I wonder).

Suggested break

When our camp at Fitzhugh was ready for occupation, we moved form Henry House, but as luck would have it I only stayed there one night, [on] account [of] being transferred to a camp on the Alberta & British

Columbia border, and where I stayed until the end of steel reached us and continued working west to mile 29, BC (Resplendent) (From then on all camps, etc., were known by their mileage from the Alberta-British Columbia border. This was in the spring of 1912 (April).

To return to Lew[is] Swift for a moment. Swift had some sort of deal cooked up with Hayes, who was at that time president of the GTP Railway and who was promoting a land development company and part of the plan included Swift's homestead to be the site of a classy resort and also a town site, which was to be called Swiftholme [sic], if I remember rightly. However, the deal fell through when Hayes lost his life when the Titanic sank in mid-Atlantic after striking an iceberg in April 1912. As you probably know Swift eventually sold his homestead in 1935 to an English man named Wilby (or Willoby) and went to live in Jasper. While we are back in the pre-30s, I might as well mention a little known fact that the original site for the Jasper Golf Course was at Henry House, approximately where the airfield is right now. It was a natural golf course with just small clumps of trees dotted here and there and would have required little more than making of the greens and sand traps, etc. I was one of the engineers, who made the survey of this location, but the project was turned down by the management and a survey was made for the golf course in its present location near the Lodge, where it had to be dug out of dense bush and rocky ground. Train load after train load of black soil was shipped in from Stony Plain and thereabouts to spread on the fairways and greens and box car loads of Kentucky bluegrass seed were sown all over the golf course. When all the work was completed, including the building of the clubhouse, etc., the cost was said to have been around two million dollars, although I never did see the actual figure. Anyway, the cost must have been at least three times what it would have cost to build the golf course at Henry House. I remember the hospital you mention in your letter and I believe, Doc Baker was in charge there. He used to ride a white horse and make frequent visits to all the construction camps within reasonable distance. He later moved to Tete Jaune and made his headquarters there. I also remember the cemetery [sic] you mention. I met Simpson and Curly Phillips and of course the Brewsters, but actually I was not in Fitzhugh very long, except for occasional one or two day visits. Tete Jaune was my headquarters for a year and then I moved west to mile 156 BC and stayed in that vicinity until World War I broke out in August 1914.

In such a big project as the building of a trans continental railroad, one came in contact with all kinds of people, some of which were really "characters" (maybe I was one myself), so it may be

of interest to mention a few. One I remember quite well is Charlie Pryne who used to own and manage the BC hotel at Resplendent. This was a log building with the entrance hallway housing the desk and the stairway leading to the one room upstairs, which had a dozen or so beds lined up on each side of the room. There was a general washbasin and a pail of water at the far end of the room. No partitions & no privacy. But there was a "convenience" under each bed. I stayed there for a couple of nights and kept wondering what would happen if a lady guest should show up. There was a dining room thru an archway at the back of the hall, with a notice above the arch which read, "in God we trust - All others pay cash" I am sure that Charlie was a Texan. He always wore a black cowboy Stetson hat, indoors & out, day & night. In fact, it was said that he slept wearing it. He also wore a gun belt with a Colt .45 in the holster. Candles were mainly used for illumination and when it came time for lights out, Charlie would amuse himself by shooting out the light from each candle with his Colt .45 and he very seldom missed. This was a nightly ritual. So much for Charlie Pryne.

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Another character worth mentioning is Fred Studebaker, a son of the millionaire Studebaker, who made the automobiles of that name. He was a wonderful piano player and when I first met him, he was playing the piano in the dance hall at Tete Jaune, but sad to say he was a drug addict and it was rumored that his father had disowned him and he had drifted up here and was following the GTP construction. I met him again years later at Brule, when the mine was still in operation, and my wife and I were putting on a show and he played the piano for us.

Two other characters, I remember, female this time, whose actual names I never did know, which is perhaps just as well, however, I recollect that one had four gold teeth in front and each was set with a diamond. She sure had a flashy smile. These "girls" had been dance hall girls at Tete Jaune, but figured they could make some money selling moonshine liquor or legal liquor, which they could purchase in Edson or Edmonton. There was no legal liquor from Edson west to Fort George where there was an hotel with a bar. The end of steel has passed Fitzhugh by the fall of 1911 and was in the vicinity of the cemetery you mentioned and by the spring of 1912 it was at mile 29 BC (Resplendent). They evidently did not fancy packing bottles of liquor around in suitcases so they purchased two rubber hot water bottles each complete with the red rubber tubing attachments which come with some of these bottles and they had a tiny tap fitted to the opposite end; to the end which

screws into the bottle. Two bottles were connected together with a Moose hide lace thru the holes in the tabs at the bottom of these bottles and is usually used to hang them up when not in use. These bags were filled with whiskey and hung around the girls' necks, hanging in front and the little tap was pushed in the top of the fancy garters which most ladies wore in those days, some of them also wore them as arm bands to hold their shirt sleeves up. They did most of their business in the camps around Fitzhugh and out on the line and they carried their "bar" with them until the bottles were empty. In the summer they wore a loose cotton dress over the bottles and a Hudson's Bay Blanket shirt during the winter. They also carried a small whiskey glass made of very thick glass, which I doubt very much if it would hold an ounce of liquid. This glass was used to dispense the liquor which was accomplished by lifting the skirt, releasing the tap from the garter, holding the glass underneath, turn on the tap and fill the glass, drop the skirt and everything was undercover, so to speak. Whiskey 50 cents. Moonshine 2 bits. This business was carried on for quite a while until a sharp-eyed policeman happened to notice that they [the girls] appeared to be somewhat stouter when they arrived in town than when they left he got a hold of a woman to act as a police matron, had them searched, and that was the finish of their activity in Fitzhugh. They were fined by the court, which they paid on the spot and I believe their water bottle outfits were confiscated. However, they moved west and carried on their "business" from Tete Jaune, west to Fort George.

Jim McInnis was also quite a character. He was the conductor on the GTP end of steel freight and usually wore a solitaire diamond ring on the four fingers of each hand, but not on the thumbs of course.

Another old timer worth remembering is Alec Munro, the one time heavy weight wrestling champion of the British Empire and who also claimed the world championship after wrestling Frank Cotch for two hours without a fall in Madison Square Gardens in New York, USA. This was around the year 1910 and he was living near Chicago. He was well fixed for money and owned several race horses. I had known Alec for quite a number of years prior to 1910 and you can't imagine my surprise when I met him prowling around in Fitzhugh and as I found out later, broke to the world. He was staying at the Jasper House Hotel [now known as the Athabasca Hotel], which was really a big tent or marquee. Just one big "room" with single beds arranged similar to those in Charlie Pryne's hotel at Resplendent. Well, we had lots to talk about and when I told him that my headquarters was at Tete Jaune, he said he was heading for there himself. So next morning we set out, we managed to get a ride on a work train as far

as mile 29 BC and then rode the so-called stage coach to Tete Jaune, a distance of around 23 miles over a trail that couldn't have been any rougher. The stagecoach was really only a wagon fixed up with a couple of seats across the front, no springs, so you felt all the bumps. The team consisted of five mules, and the driver, who never used a whip, carried a water pail filled with medium, sized pebbles between his feet, as he sat in the driver's seat. So whenever he wished to communicate with the lead mule, he would pick up a pebble from the pail and throw it at the lead mule and very seldom missed hitting it square between the ears. The mule always got the message and speeded things up. The day after we arrived at Tete Jaune. Alec got a job with Foley, Welch & Stewart building scows to carry supplies and men down the Fraser River to the numerous construction camps. He also worked as a blacksmith and also staged a wrestling match every Saturday night, taking on all comers.

I started to write this letter on July 22 and now it is August 15, so again I must apologize for the delay in answering, but I have had so many interruptions. I am sorry that I haven't more information of the early times in Fitzhugh, but all my experiences were mostly west of there, down the Fraser valley.

I can hardly agree with the expression with which you finished your letter (quote) "What a life". Let me assure you that it was a great life and one, which I am proud of being a part of, as it is something that will never happen again and it was life far better than the rat race we live in today.

Let me finish by stating that I will be pleased to answer (if I can) any further questions you may wish to ask.

Sincerely,
Fred W. Hindle