

Ranching

Trail, continued on for another three hundred miles and eventually reached Fernie and the coal fields awaiting the arrival of the Canadian Pacific's transcontinental trains.

The Dewdney Trail, or Hope Trail, also provided access from the Lower Mainland to the Mission Valley. Pack trains carried the ordinary and the extraordinary, settlers rode and walked, and Father Pandosy travelled back and forth many times as the Okanagan's first pianos and billiard tables were hauled over the pack trail. Riders on horseback strapped mail pouches to their saddles, prospectors followed the latest rumours of gold discoveries and cattle barons drove their herds from the Interior over the trail to the port of New Westminster. The famous also used the trail: American General William Tecumseh Sherman travelled from Osoyoos to Hope in 1883 with a military escort of sixty men, and Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria travelled over the trail to the Similkameen in search of bighorn sheep before his 1914 assassination, the event that triggered World War I. The remarkable engineering of the Dewdney Trail established the first route into the Okanagan from the Lower Mainland of BC.

FEEDING THE INFLUX - Ranching

There were more cattle in Oregon than buyers and Palmer and Miller's expedition encouraged ranchers to look north to sell their stock. Soon a succession of cattle drives followed the old brigade trail through the Okanagan and continued on to the Cariboo goldfields. Attempting to collect all the revenue due them, the colonial government levied taxes of a dollar a head at Kamloops, or drovers could pay a one-time fee to cover them for a six-month period. Yet the government was aware there were too few cattle in the British territory to feed the miners. Not wanting to deal with a food shortage, government representatives were known to turn a blind eye to those who slipped past the forts. It wasn't long before cattle began overwintering on the abundant bunch grass ranges along the Thompson River, near the fort at Kamloops, waiting to be driven to the Cariboo when the trail re-opened in the spring.

Old Hudson's Bay men and drovers who knew the land began pre-empting the ranges along the Thompson River in the early 1860s, and settling in the area. About the same time, the Vernon brothers arrived from Ireland in search of gold, and a man named Cornelius O'Keefe decided he could make more money raising cattle instead of driving them from Oregon. All pre-empted large acreages in the North Okanagan. As

mines developed in the Boundary and Kootenay areas, Thomas Ellis, another Irishman, and J.C. Haynes, a customs officer who took payment in cattle when the drovers didn't have the cash, accumulated even larger acreages in the South Okanagan. The settlement around Father Pandosy's Mission was at the midpoint of the valley, and farther from the gold discoveries and the mining boom; it received little benefit from the activity going on to the north and to the south. Most of those who settled around the Mission were subsistence farmers, though some also ran herds of cattle on the bunch grass hillsides and sold their stock to miners passing through the area.

When the Cariboo's gold was mined out, the number of men working claims also diminished, and the demand for beef and other provisions disappeared. Those settlers who retained remnants of their once-large herds took great interest in discussions about the colony of British Columbia becoming part of the Canadian Confederation. Of even greater interest was the promise of a railway that would join British Columbia with Eastern Canada. Construction was rumoured to be starting within two years. In addition to feeding the construction crews, ranchers could use the rail line to deliver cattle to the Cariboo and the Kootenays. On the strength of the promised railway, British Columbia joined Canada in 1871.

In the meantime, the once-abundant bunch grass ranges of the Okanagan were over-grazed, and many ranchers had little choice but to become subsistence farmers, though the entrepreneurs among them opened trading posts, became postmasters or started up sawmills or grist mills. Those with connections ran for public office or were appointed to government positions. Few had any cash to buy additional land, even at a dollar an acre, and those with cattle used nearby Crown ranges as their herds began to grow. The winter of 1879-80 was unusually severe, and when thousands of cattle starved to death, ranchers realized they needed to grow hay to prevent such catastrophes from happening in the future. It wasn't long before the valley's bottomlands were transformed from range to hayfields.

The long-awaited construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway finally got underway in early 1880. The chosen route through the Kicking Horse Pass and Kamloops set the stage for a dramatic turnaround in the Okanagan cattle business. Five thousand men constructed the line between Yale and Savona (about 175 miles) and the demand for beef was so great that even the large syndicates—the Douglas Lake Cattle

Company in the Nicola Valley and the British Columbia Cattle Company in the South Okanagan—couldn't meet the railway's demand for beef. Cattle sales provided the ranchers with the cash needed to buy land; the large O'Keefe and Coldstream ranches in the North Okanagan and the Lequime, Knox and Postill ranches in the Mission Valley grew to many thousands of acres. The railway also brought settlers to the Prairies, and then took BC cattle eastward to feed them. Some Okanagan ranchers saw an opportunity closer to home and opened their own butcher shops in the Lower Mainland to provide for the growing number of settlers heading west. The Okanagan was transformed into wide-open rangeland where large herds of cattle thrived on the luxurious bunch grass that covered the valley's hillsides and bottomlands.

AND, FINALLY, SETTLERS

The Americans always coveted Southern BC. Even after the international boundary was established in 1846, many maintained that the British part of the Columbia District—the land between Oregon and Alaska—was still rightfully part of their Oregon Territory. It didn't take long for those in BC's colonial government to realize they needed settlers in the Okanagan and the Kootenays. To ensure the land stayed in British hands, British citizens could pre-empt 160 acres of land by 1860. Some registered their land, stayed to work their property and quietly became part of the growing community. Others claimed land but moved on, and those who followed claimed the same property. Some just squatted on the land or made minor improvements, then moved on and left little or no trace of their presence.

Many of those passing through the Mission Valley commented on the poverty of those trying to eke out a living there. With few exceptions, the houses were small and poorly constructed—one leather-hinged door and two small windows, perhaps filled in with glass brought by pack train, or just thinly scraped hides. There was little opportunity to sell what was grown, so most settlers only grew or raised what their family needed. Yet with Father Pandosy as the founding force behind the new Mission and his French Oblate order supporting his endeavours, French-speaking settlers from both Quebec and France were drawn to the Mission Valley. French was the language of instruction at the school as well. Many details of these early settlers have been lost to time but names such as Laurence, Christien, Boucherie and Bouvette continue to resonate locally. Others left a more substantial record.