

History of Seymour Arm

HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF SEYMOUR ARM AREA 1860 – 1970

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THE GOLD RUSH ERA

Nothing in the world can work man's imagination into frenzy quicker than the word "GOLD" As early as 1861, that magic word was coaxing prospectors and adventurers up the Columbia until they reached the Big Bend area. By 1865 enough gold had been found to stir the optimism of gold hunters from the Cariboo to California; Victoria and Portland each striving to be the gateway to the new bonanza.

The Hudson's Bay Company was now noting the activity in the Big Bend area and was taking steps to secure a share in the new trade. On November 14, 1864, Chief Factor Roderick Finlayson was able to write from Victoria to Chief Trader Wm. McKay at Kamloops; 'We note that Mr. Marten is stationed for the water at the East end of Lake Shuswap and that he had pre-empted a section of land there for the Company'. The post in question was at the head of the long northern arm of the Shuswap now called Seymour Arm.

The abundance of wild berries and game as well as the annual spawning run of Salmon drew not only the Shuswap Indian tribes, but also the raiding Blackfoot and Smokey Indians of Alberta. This resulted in countless battles, which were thought to be recorded in the form of Indian paintings and pictographs. Strange as it may seem, one of the raiding trails of the Blackfoot Indians was destined to become the prospector's path from Seymour Arm to the Big Bend gold country.

The first recorded parties entered the Big Bend country by way of Colville, Washington Territory. One of these was headed by William Downie in April 1865. They found gold in paying quantities on Carnes Creek and also on French Creek and Goldstream. By September 1865 the Victoria Colonist reported '...diggings paying \$16 - \$18 a day have been struck.' And in November of the same year, reported takings of up to 6 oz. To the pan—25 to 65 oz. A day by the Half Breed Co. on French Creek.. This article states nuggets were found of from \$15 to \$20 apiece, and weighing up to one and one-half ounces. One man, Dupuis, took out \$5000 from French Creek, \$500 in one day. On McCulloch Creek, the Clemens Company of Mr. Richard Edwards "...took out 12 to 35 oz. Per day before they quit and on the last day took out \$105 in one pan. This gold, described "rough, flat, and very bright" assayed at \$18.50 an ounce and brought \$17 from the traders according to the Portland Oregonian.

This then was the prospects to the end of 1865. Two routes were available to supply this area, one from Colville, Washington Territory, up the Columbia River and Arrow Lakes; the other from the Cariboo Trail to Savona, then by water up the Thompson System to Seymour, and over the Gold Range by trail. In 1865 the government sent in Walter Moberly, with Turnbull and Green, to survey the town on Seymour and the trail over the Gold Range. In this survey of the town Moberly disallowed the H.B.C. pre-emption.

The town was originally called Ogden City of Ogdenville, ostensibly after the Hudson's Bay Co. factor there (whom the H.B.C. have no record of) This was changed to Seymour City to honour Frederick Seymour, then Governor of the Crown Colony of British Columbia.

Spurred on by the threat of the river steamer 'Forty-nine' being built at Colville, the Hudson's Bay Co. in June 1865 ordered Chief Trader W.A. Mouatt to Fort Kamloops to "...examine Thompson's River and Shushwap Lakes, ascertaining the facilities on those waters for navigating a steamboat.' In addition Roderick Finlayson wrote, on October 11, to McKay at Kamloops '...before you return to Yale, examine carefully the depth of water and the breadth of channel in the shallowest parts of the river between the Kamloops and Shushwap Lakes and report the same to us ...this examination to be made when the water is at its lowest stage in the river.' The cumulation of these reports was the decision to build a boat, the S.S. MARTEN, under the direction of Mr. Wright.

However, freight was already moving from Seymour through the Gold Range, over what was known as Moberly's trail. Smith and Ladner had a regular pack train service to the Columbia and on July 1865, sent a pack train of thirty to forty horses over under the care of local Indians. They also hired Indians to backpack supplies to the miners and that fall drove ten head of cattle over this trail.

BOAT SERVICE TO THE SEYMOUR ARM AREA 1860-1867

The first boat of any size to operate as a commercial freight shipper on the Shuswap and Thompson River system was a 30 foot bateau built for the Hudson's Bay Co. in 1860 by Valette. This boat was equipped with mast and yardarms as well as oars. She was used to carry furs and dried salmon from Shuswap Lake: including apparently, the Seymour Arm area; to Kamloops, as well as various local cargoes.

However the Hudson's Bay Co. found that the demand for a freight and passenger service to Seymour Arm, due to the gold rush on the Columbia, necessitated the building of a larger boat: so they decided on a sternwheeler, to be named the Marten. Her dimensions are given by Norman Hacking in British Columbia Historical Quarterly X2 P. 111 under 'BRITISH COLUMBIA STEAMBOAT DAYS' as

Dimensions: 125ft by 5 ft

Registered Tonnage: 282.51 tons

Engines: 40.25 h.p.

The Marten was built of locally whip-sawed lumber sawn by Brock McQueen, and cost the H.B.C. \$63,000 completed. Fully loaded with wood and water, the Marten drew only 25 inches of water. The progress on the Marten and other lake shipping is described in the following extracts from the Victoria Colonist:

March 2, 1866:

WE understand that Captain Moffatt, of the Hudson's Bay Company, is to have command of the company's steamer now building on Shuswap Lake.

March 10, 1866:

WE understand that Mr. Trahey and his shipwrights will leave on the next steamer for Fraser River, and will proceed up to Savona's Ferry at once to construct the steamer "Marten" for the Hudson's Bay Company.

April 7, 1866:

The BOILERS AND MACHINERY MANUFACTURED AT THE Albion Foundry for the Company's steamer building at Shuswap was shipped by the ENTERPRISE.

April 23, 1866:

**EXCERPTS OF A LETTER FROM SEYMOUR, HEAD OF BIG
SHUSWAP LAKE; DATED APRIL 10, 1866,**

AFTER leaving Fort Kamloops we proceed by land about 45 miles up to the point where Captain Wm. Moore built his boat which is six miles above where the steamboat is being constructed. Captain Moore is the same energetic, hard working man he was in Victoria. He has two boats, both scows, built; one of which is decked over for passengers. And the other is intended for freight, she will probably carry about 30 tons... After waiting at this point five days for the ice to break up in the upper Shuswap Lake, we took passage on the first trip of the boats; the price paid being \$5 and one cent per pound for freight, provided the boat could get all the way; distance about 65 miles.

After going about ten miles we struck the ice and had to take to land travel; for although the ice was too hard to get a boat through, it was too weak to travel over with safety. Parties are camped all along the lake, having got so far and not being able to go any further with their provisions, so all are praying for the ice to break up, but it is impossible to say when their prayers will be granted.

The steamboat timber is about all ready, and when we came along they were looking every day for the arrival of Mr. Trahey with the moulds, after which the work could be gone on with great speed, and it is asserted she will be ready by the specified time (middle of May). In the meantime the boats, of which I should suppose there are about a dozen, will reap their harvest, although even after that time they will do a good business by taking freight at less rates than the steamer...

April 23, 1866

FROM Mr. Barnard, who came down by her, we learn that the Shuswap Lake is clear of ice, and navigation open. The steamer MARTEN is rapidly approaching completion. Her boilers have reached the steamboat landing, and the balance of her machinery is being pushed through with the utmost possible dispatch.

April; 23

OUR tidy little boat; "THE LADY OF THE LAKE", which was built at the Little Lake, was the first boat to arrive at Seymour this spring.

May 10, 1866

THE steamer MARTEN is planked and caulked, and will be launched for certain on Thursday next. A gentleman who saw her describes the vessel as a model of beauty, apparently very strongly built; he gives as his opinion that when she is completed there will not be so fine a steamer in the colony. The engineers have the machinery all arranged and ready for fitting the moment the steamer is brought down. The boat will be ready to run in a very short time.

May 15, 1866

WE have the pleasure of informing our readers that the Hudson's Bay Co.'s steamer, MARTEN, was launched on the 10th ., and she is now at Savona's Ferry getting in the machinery. It is expected that she will be making her first trip across the lakes at the time

agreed with the Government. The Company are deserving of praise for the expedition they have manifested in getting the steamer ready.

According to the Colonists the MARTEN left Savona's Ferry at 5 p.m. on a Saturday and arrived in Kamloops at 7:45 p.m. She then left at 6 a.m. the next day arriving at Seymour at 6 p.m.

June 4, 1866

EXCERPTS OF A LETTER FROM W.E.O. OF SEYMOUR

DATED: MAY 27, 1866

..STEAMER MARTEN coming round the point and delighting the eyesight of every Seymourite as she glided through the noble waters of Shuswap Lake. Five hundred hungry pioneers about that time were partaking of their evening dose of beans and bacon, but at the sight of the steamer they hurriedly cast pots and pans aside and soon the roar of mighty cannonading was heard emanating from the efforts of the Royal Anvil Artillery. Every available explosive weapon was brought to bear so the steamer might receive a hearty welcome. Three rousing cheers rent the air. The passengers responded in kind. Speeches of welcome were made by the Seymourites – but their efforts were as nothing to the response of the commander of the MARTEN who caused champagne and HBC rum to flow freely for the benefit of all hands on board and of every individual who stood on the beach.

A wonderful trip through the beautiful Thompson River country had been enjoyed by all including the Indians who were almost frantic at the sight of a steamer and rode furiously along the banks trying to keep up with her.

June 14, 1866

THE Hudson's Bay Co.'s steamer MARTEN is running twice a week between Savona's Ferry and Seymour. She charges \$10 fare and \$20 a ton freight. These charges are considered exorbitant, and the small boats are liberally patronized, most of the miners going by them in preference to the steamer. They carry passengers for \$5.50 up and down, and charge \$15 a ton for freight. They make the trip in four and a half days up and two and a half back...

THE TOWN OF SEYMOUR

The MARTEN was now ready to supply the town of Seymour which has developed into a sizable settlement. The following extracts from the Victoria Colonist exemplify the development and extent of this town.

March 6, 1866

THE officer administrating the Government of British Columbia has notified that the name of the new town site at the north east end of Shuswap Lake shall be SEYMOUR instead of OGDENVILLE.

April 17, 1866

The surveyor General of British Columbia notifies that the townsite of Seymour, at the northeastern extremity of Shuswap Lake will be immediately laid out and the lots sold by public auction on the spot, at noon on Saturday, the 9th June next.

April 23, 1866

THIS place (Ogdenville or Seymour) at present consists of about 20 buildings; finished and building; there being 2 BUTCHER SHOPS, 1 HOTEL, 1 SALOON, 1 BAKERS, AND 2 GENERAL STORES. The Steamboat landing has been selected by Mr. Joseph McKay; who is now here; and is a few hundred feet above the present buildings. The first death here took place yesterday, being that of a man named Henry Evans, formerly of Cariboo and I believe an American by birth. Business is duller here at present than it has been all winter, and will continue so until the lakes open as most of the miners have left for the creeks and no large numbers of fresh arrivals can be looked for until the boats are able to reach here. Flour, which appears to be the most abundant article all through the country, being 20cts. Per lb. Fresh been, 40 cts: beans, 45 cts. Bacon \$1.25 candles. \$1.50; other things in proportion, averaging about \$1 per lb. No vegetables of any kind whatever are to be procured at present, but they can be got quite readily as soon as the lake opens. Meals (very good ones considering) and \$1.50. About 200 men are at present computed to be in the Big Bend district, but I believe none have got through on the Columbia route yet....

June 4, 1866

EXCERPTS OF A LETTER FROM W.E.O. OF SEYMOUR

DATED: MAY 27, 1866

BEFORE concluding I must say a few words about our city and its future prospects. The population is about five hundred, and can boast of six saloons, thirteen stores, five bakeries, three restaurants, two butcher shops, and eleven shoemakers, two painters, one stationery shop, six physicians, and a drug store, two tin shops, two barber shops, eight washhouses and a bathing house. I might also mention an extensive fishery, two breweries, two blacksmiths' shops and a livery stable to say nothing of a coffee and doughnut stand.

JUNE 21, 1866

THE TOWN CRIER OR SEYMOUR CHARIVARI

A manuscript weekly publication under the above title made its appearance at the town of Seymour on the 8th instant. A copy of the first number, containing besides advertisements, an excellent introductory article, and some racy hits, a la Punch, has reached us. The Publisher (who was formerly a resident in this city) has succeeded in obtaining 41 subscribers at four bits a copy: and, should sufficient inducements offer, undertake to obtain newspaper plant and type.

THE END OF AN ERA AND DECLINE OF SEYMOUR

1867 – 1900

This represented the high point, all that was lacking was a large supply of easily obtainable gold. However, in the Big Bend area, miners had to contend with not only deep snows making a late spring break up, but also flooded creeks and deep, plunging bedrock. Miners were advised to have four or five hundred dollars, as credit was almost impossible to obtain. The returns just did not repay the effort and expense of getting supplies. An extract of a letter from W.E.O. around the close of 1866 states:
NOTWITHSTANDING THE MANY DISAPPOINTED, SORE FOOTED, LIGHT POCKETED,...BOOTLESS AND PANTLESS SPECIMENS OF THE GENUS HOMO RETURNING FROM SEYMOUR... Gold was still being taken out of the Big Bend area but only by a minority of determined skilled miners. The whole of the gold taken on the Columbia for the 1866 season was less than \$250,000.

A letter in the June 6, 1867 issue of the Victoria Colonist states that a fire two weeks before had raged around Seymour and consumed a store and goods owned by Messrs. Smith and Ladner, valued at \$10,000.

Seymour steadily declined so that on August 29, 1867 H.P. Featherstone in a report to the Colonist Secretary wrote:

THIS once flourishing village is fast going to decay. No. of houses; 30, with cabins. No. empty, 15. 6 wholesale merchants have left and also the brewery. No. of inhabitants; 24, 8 stragglers, 2 Indians. This place can never compete with Colville; freight (from there): in steamboat 5 cts. To Landing, 3 cts. To French Creek: from here to French Creek from 12 to 15 cts. Per pound. The village now consists of three general stores, one eating house and whisky mill, and one bakers and whisky mill.

The end came when Chief Factor W.F. Tolmie ordered the closing of the post at Seymour on October 21, 1867. All goods, doors, windows, and any other movable objects of value were taken to Kamloops. This collapse of the Big Bend rush along with a decrease in returns from the Cariboo threw the province into a recession.

The MARTEN, which had operated under a \$400 a month government subsidy, had been laid up for some time. Although she did various odd jobs on the Thompson system, she was never again used as transportation to Seymour. On January 11, 1869 the Victoria Colonist stated that the MARTEN was robbed of nearly every movable article by three men who had been left in charge of her. This same gang apparently stripped the remains of the town of Seymour during the same period; in some instances wantonly destroying items. The MARTEN'S short career ended with her running aground on a rock on Kamloops Lake in October 1877.

Seymour now settled quietly back, undisturbed until the early 1900's except for logging. This area at that time contained some of the finest timber in the Shuswap; the stumps still remain to testify the trees' size.

SEYMOUR ARM 1900 – 1940

The Agricultural Era

Surveyors mapping the railway belt in 1889-1912 which included part of Seymour Arm, were the first to describe this area as suitable for fruit growing. This area was brought to the notice of Maxwell Smith, editor of THE FRUIT MAGAZINE in Vancouver who reported the following: ...I must admit to being agreeably surprised at finding a considerable area of land at the head of the Arm suitable for agricultural purposes, and particularly well adapted to the production of apples, pears, plums, and all kinds of small fruits ..There is a diversity of soil at Seymour Arm which makes it desirable for those engaged in fruit growing ...That portion of the country at the head of Seymour Arm which I had an opportunity of observing seemed to be particularly well sheltered by the surrounding mountains and for this reason more tender fruits may be grown there than the latitude would indicate.'

It was during this time that SEYMOUR ARM FRUITLANDS was formed with head office in Vancouver. This company had acquired 6500 acres north and northeast of the original 1865 townsite of which 440 acres were subdivided into 5 acre blocks, in November 1908. According to the company's brochure of November 1910, this land, in blocks, sold at \$125. an acre for fruit land and \$100 an acre for market gardening land. The company figured the cost of establishing a 10 acre orchard, hiring out the labour, as;

COST OF LAND, Cleared.....	\$1750.
PLOUGHING AND PREPARING	60.
1090 TREES @ \$.20 including fillers	1218.
PLANTING at \$.10	109.
CULTIVATION, first year	175.
TOTAL OUTLAY	2312.

The terms of sale were 1/5 down, with balance in 4 annual payments. Two year old apple trees according to the advertisements sold at \$15. per 100-500 for \$60. cherries and plum trees at \$20. per 100; and strawberry plants at \$6. per 1000--\$75. per 100. According to the brochure apples sold at 2 cts. a lb., strawberries \$2. a crate, tomatoes \$12. a ton, potatoes \$15. a ton, and eggs 35 cts. a dozen.

In April 1910, Mr. Freeman arrived to take up his post as manager of the Company. By November 1910, the company had provided a store, stocked for the convenience of the settlers with provisions and clothing; a school; hotel; and post office. In addition, the company undertook to give work to any settler who became financially embarrassed, and to carry, interest free, the account of any settler unable to work because of illness or weather conditions. The company offered employment in building, fencing, land clearing, logging, painting, ploughing, plumbing, and road making. In the future they hoped to provide electricity and running water from the falls on the Seymour River.

Prosperity continued in 1911, 50 new families were expected with further delegations due to look over the land for settlement groups. The population at this time was about 200, making this the second largest settlement on Shuswap Lake after Salmon Arm. The company had by that time purchased a donkey engine for stump pulling in their land clearing project. Work commenced on the new government wharf in the fall of 1912. This wharf, a L shaped structure located in front of the Hotel, was 850 ft. long and 16 ft. wide. A small sawmill was brought in to saw the timber required.

The Hotel had been leased from the Fruitland Co. for two years and was purchased in August 1913, by a Mr. Bergen, who planned to completely remodel it. He was to add a billiard room and build a boathouse on the beach as well as provide all facilities for boating and fishing in the hopes of making it one of the attractive tourist spots in the interior. However the failure of a petition to procure a liquor license for the hotel probably had an adverse effect on these ambitious plans, although in 1915 the hotel, under management of Mrs. Bergen, drew visitors from Kamloops and all over the North Okanagan.

Throughout this period the local roads had been improved, as well as a good trail made up the west fork of the Seymour to the meadow lands and the mining claims. In addition, starts were made on a road contract to Sicamous or Craigalachie, but apparently the lake steamer provided an easier and cheaper link.

During this time an enterprising resident, Maurice Gillis, acquired a section of meadow land near the trail, which he proceeded to drain so it could be used as hay land for the pack trains. This was abandoned with the abandonment of the mining venture, but the drainage system still remains operative today.

The local fall fair was held in the wharf's storage shed and boasted upwards of 45 entrants. In 1915 excursions on the Maud Annis from Blind Bay and on the Anavana from Salmon Arm offered a special rate of \$.50 for the round trip. Produce shown was said to be of excellent size with onions up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pound each and huge strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries. Also included in the fair were flowers, bakery items, and handwork.

However, this was fated not to last. The first calamity struck with the commencement of World War 1 when many of the settlers joined the forces, leaving the families behind to carry on. The second was a severe black frost in 1916. This killed a good portion of young fruit trees and left many families in a desolate state financially, forcing them to leave for the larger centers to look for work.

Some of the settlers continued to stay on raising small fruits, logging, trapping, or working in conjunction with the mining exploratory work. The Collins' brothers who had arrived in 1910 with their mother and father, a gifted artist, operated a cannery for small fruits. They found a ready market for their quality products until the cost of freight and labour no longer made it profitable.