

Shuswap Lake Tales

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Introduction

The Shuswap Lake in the province of British Columbia, Canada has a shoreline circumference of over 1,000 kilometres with various small communities scattered around it. The population ranges from 87 in the smallest community to 17,706 in the largest. The landscape surrounding the lake mainly consists of dense forests and is largely untamed. It is a landscape that has experienced three short-lived gold rushes, meriting scant mention in history books and tracings of miners' log cabins can be found deep in the forests. Paddleboat ferries used to transport people and goods across the lake; today automobiles make the journey along the Trans-Canada Highway on the southern side or on dirt roads on the north shore. Even so, some areas are impossible to reach during the winter as the roads are unnavigable due to snowpacks. The Canadian Pacific trains no longer stop to pick up passengers at the stations along the southern side of the lake. Instead, they pass right by with their 80+ cars in length carrying goods to and from Asia.

It's a space that has hidden conscription dodgers since World War I through the Vietnam War, necessitating those men to learn to live off the land in hostile terrain. As the gold rush dwindled, settlers turned to farming. These communities settled with many hopes and dreams, some envisioning their community as becoming the greatest summer resort along the Canadian Pacific rail line. I am interested in this space and the latent history of the immigrant settlers and homesteaders who chose to live in this beautiful yet harsh terrain. I hint at the physical transformations of the landscape as it changes seasonally as well as the passage of time through my photomontages. By using archival images provided by the settlers' and homesteaders' descendants juxtaposed with my own landscape images I create a dialogue between the settlers, descendants, and myself as newcomer to this area, and invite the viewer to encounter the gaze of the past looking back at us. This notion of collaborating and injecting my work with other voices, forms an ongoing conversation between the descendants, ourselves, and future generations.

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RS BY LAKE FROM CHASE TO SEYMOUR ARM

First One of the Many Delightful Excursions That Can Be Taken By Visitors To Chase Through a Country in Which Land and Water Mingle All Their Charms.

Leaving Chase at 7 a. m., and following first a north-easterly course, your motorboat, if it is a good one, will bring you at noon to the wharf at Seymour Arm.

If the day is fine, and any other summer than the present one it would almost surely be that, the journey means five hours that are full of rare enjoyment.

After casting off from the government wharf at Chase, the first four miles of your course lies through the Little Shuswap Lake. Here you can watch the C. P. R. trains wind their way along the southern margin as they skirt the bases of the hills that come clear to the water's edge. Every now and then there will be a splash, most likely on the opposite direction from that in which you are looking, and if you turn your head quickly enough you may catch a glimpse of a four or five pound trout as he breaks the surface and describes a curve in the air. Yet if you wish to make your destination in time for lunch you must not stop to cast a line.

At the upper end of the Little Shuswap the speed of the boat slackens by half as it enters the strong current of the Little River. Its two miles of swift water must be stemmed before the craft again gathers headway as you open out upon the wider reaches of the main lake.

For the first ten or fifteen miles the way lies between shores that are more or less settled. On the right are the gently sloping acres of the Shuswap and Lillooet Fruitlands, Limited. Their manager, Walter S. Mitchell, has a strong force of men at work rooting up and burning the forest to make room for the more profitable and civilized apple tree. In the centre of these farms is the new townsite of Sorrento, destined to be the home of a prosperous and happy village population.

Farther on you pass the broad entrance of Blind Bay, already becoming noted for its fruit exports.

About eight miles from the entrance of the main lake the boat passes to the left of Copper Island and the occupants get a nearer view of the northern shore. For several miles it bears the name of Celista. In many of the houses on the homesteads that line the waterside is heard the accent that tells the speaker would know heather if he saw it. Celista is locally famous for its Scotch dances and its solid vote at election times.

Celista is the last of the settlement. From there on you are, if possible, nearer to nature's heart. The unbroken forest extends from the tops of the high hills to where the waves meet the pebbles.

About thirty miles from where we entered the main lake we come to the narrows. From this point on it no longer is called the main lake, but branches out into three arms, the Seymour Arm, twenty-three miles long, extending due north, the Anstey Arm, running eight miles in an easterly direction, and the Salmon Arm, stretching south for a distance almost equal to the length of the main lake.

At the far end of the first mentioned "Arm" the destination is reached.





The Stewart family, my grandfather Albert Stewart, Grandmother Maud (Kernaghan) Stewart, inherited the home from Wm. and Marion Miller. In Mt. Ida, it is where the old Mt. Ida Hall was moved to the farm. It was right on the corner, where the big old barn sits (my 98 year old aunt remembers it being there when she was a young girl about 5 years old....so it's old!), the Mt. Ida Hall was used as a small classroom this past year I am told. It used to be on the corner where the mail boxes for that area are standing now. The field that the Mt. Ida Hall is now in, and it was completely restored is the old Stewart farm. In fact that field where the Mt. Ida Hall now sits was a potato field as my Grandfather Stewart grew seed potatoes.

PO







“Yeah, my Uncle Bill was just telling a story that so my great grandfather [Charles Doebert] that came over from Wisconsin – apparently there was a bar fight or something and a gun was taken out and somebody got shot and then my great grandfather ended up moving here. So that could be why he left Wisconsin.”

“A wanted man?”

“Exactly, yeah, possibly.”

HL

Charles Edward Doebert
1881-1959
Edith 1892-



Blind Bay.

The marriage of Mr. Chas. Doebert and Miss Edith Burrell, two of our popular young people, was solemnised in the hall at Blind Bay on Wednesday afternoon. Rev. Mr. Reed of Salmon Arm tied the knot.

There was a public dance given in the evening in honor of the contracting parties. They only took a look in at it and then the happy couple left on the evening train for the coast. The assembly did not break up, however, and doubtless during the merry hours of the night progress was made towards other similar events.



“...there’s a story that ... Deb Bischoff was born in a snowbank not far from our farm. I had no idea. Apparently, Deb’s mother was walking out to my grandmother who had apparently acted as a midwife from time to time. I had no idea. No one ever told me that. Can you imagine being nine months pregnant, in labour, in winter, setting off on a five mile walk to get help? She was about 3.5 miles into that walk when she ended up in a snowbank having that baby!”

FC

“There’s another little girl I went to school with, Gloria Vaillincourt, her mother’s gravestone reads “Little Flower of the Artic”. Her mother was adopted by the explorer Roald Amundsen.”

“The one who went to the South Pole?”

“Yeah! That would be the one. So his adopted daughter lived in Scotch Creek. So I went to school with her kids, Gloria and Paul. It’s fascinating who washed up, I mean how did they get there?”

FC

“I’ve probably got more photos taken in 1941 – Blackie the bear at the Ruckle homestead. I think the tree has been taken down, but I can still see his paw prints by the well.”

“Was he tame?”

“Yes, he became a pet. I have a picture of my grandmother with the little fellow. She is washing the clothes in the laundry tub outside the cabin and Blackie is kind of standing up beside her watching.”

FC



Photo: Eileen Blais





THE CHASE TRIBUNE
KEEP SWEET AND KEEP MOVING IT TELLS THEY'RE COMING TO CHASE
Vol. 1. No. 37. Chase, B. C., Friday, January 3, 1913 \$2.00 Per Year

Gold at Celesta Creek.
An authoritative report from Lake Shuswap states that a sample of ore taken from the vicinity of Celesta creek has proved by analysis to contain a rich vein of gold and that a large sum of money offered to the lucky finder by the representative of a Seattle syndicate has not been accepted.—Ex.



“In 1967 was the Mag fire. At the time it was the second largest fire in BC history. So every man in the community was up fighting that. Our farm faced Profit Mt where the fire was, and I remember I could literally see because as it got dark it was a tough fire because the trees were crowning. The fire jumped from tree top to tree top. We could actually see it and it was coming down the hill towards us. So you have to remember we had no electricity, no running water and no telephone. We had a battery powered radio. So we could see it coming. So there’s a bunch of pieces because my dad and my brother were there and all of the neighbours who were old enough. So there was that fear. And then for my mom, I remember vividly, she had a plan. She’d listen to the radio, and she had a plan. When she decided it was close enough, we had 2 old horses, my sister Marcy and Jerry were going to go on one horse and she and I were going on the second horse, and we were going to go straight down – we were a mile from the lake. Pretty much straight down Meadow Creek Rd and we were going to go down that road and straight into the lake.”

“That was the safest place.”

“Yup, but she had it all worked out. That was the deal. My grandmother was on alert for evacuation because she lived right on the waterfront of Celistra. That was a big thing. The fire encircled my dad so that was probably one of the highlights of his life, so a helicopter flew over, threw a ladder down. He grabbed hold of it and the minute they could see he had a hold of it they didn’t wait. They just lifted him up and flew him out over the ring of fire.”

“That must have been so scary!”

“Yup! That was a big one. My brother and Neil Bischoff – similar one, but not quite as badly – trapped. They were both driving equipment – cats or bulldozers – so they actually drove through the fire line on their cats. My brother wasn’t bad. Neil got burnt ... through metal so his legs were scorched so he was in a lot of pain. It was either that or die! That was a big thing.

I remember the outrage at the end of that fire. I remember my dad being so angry and other men, I’m sure. As at the end of that it was all government of course, so all of the food – they just dug a pit and bulldozed it and buried all the food. I remember people did go back to scavenge. My dad, I remember this massive tin of ham. It was like a loaf of bread they actually went back up and dug some of this stuff out. It was all canned, sealed, good food. Yeah, that was scary. That was a big thing – 1967. Known as the Mag fire – it was on Crowfoot Mountain.”

FC relating story to photographer



“My parents, Margaret (Stewart) & William (Bill) Hopkins built a house at the other end of Beatty Ave. My grandparents, Winnie & Bill Hopkins, lived in that little house across from the Thrift Store and my parents built at the other end.....back in those days it was Granny and Grandpa’s place.”

PO





When the people of a town feel big, think big and act big—they are big. The world accepts them at the estimate they place upon themselves. And the people of this big little town certainly feel as mighty as any living human beings. They feel that they are helping build up one of the best cities on the Western Hemisphere. Surely they are justified somewhat in that belief. Four years ago the population of Chase was two men and a dog. Today the population includes over 500 people and God only knows how many dogs. That's going some, isn't it? And we are getting ready to go some more.



CELISTA PIONEERS

THE FERRIES

As long as the lake lay between stores, railways and communication lines, people felt isolated indeed from the outer world. Happily the coming of a ferry boat between Scotch Creek and Sorrento around the year 1917 linked Celista to the great outside. Mr. Morris was the first ferryman. Mr. Ivens, Erny Myers were others and Mr. Poole, our present Captain, has been giving excellent service for nearly twenty years. About twelve years ago a fine bridge was built at Squilax across the South Thompson River. No longer was ice on the lake nor stormy days completely shut us off from trading centres or lines of communication.









The Daily News
NEW WESTMINSTER, B. C. MONDAY MORNING, OCT 29 1907
White, Shiles & Co
REAL ESTATE
260 Columbia St. Phone 85
TEN CENTS PER WEEK

HAUNTED CABIN.
A Mystery of Scotch Creek, Shuswap Lake.
Vernon, B. C., Oct. 27.— Strange tales have been brought down by prospectors, cruisers and others coming from the north of Shuswap Lake, of a solitary cabin buried in the forest on the banks of Scotch Creek, one of the biggest feeders of the lake. In years gone by and in the olden days when the rush for gold was going on and the almost frenzied mania of gold seeking had seized nearly everyone in the country, this little shack appears for the first time, not the one in existence now, but what was in those days a general store for prospectors and trappers, etc. An air of mystery hovers around that locality known as the Canyon and rumors of dark deeds have always been current relating to the time when lawlessness was much in evidence and the power of British authority was scarcely heeded. The spot whereon the present cabin now stands, was once the site of a store or trading house, and rumor says that a trapper was done to death in the building. All trace of the old place has long since disappeared and a log cabin of more modern construction now takes its place. But those who have slept there report strange noises and sounds at night, unaccountable and uncanny. Statements to this effect have been corroborated and the cabin has now the reputation of being haunted and the crime committed in by gone days has thus been perpetuated.





