

Courthouse and Jail in early Kamloops

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Harry Balf.

When Kamloops consisted merely of the HBC fort and a small Indian village, local justice was maintained by Indian tribal law and by the Company's discipline, which was quite rigid. In occasional serious cases the prisoner was escorted to the coast.

During the 1860s, however, independent settlers were starting to farm in the district, and there was a great annual influx of miners en route to Tranquille, the Cariboo, and Big Bend. In general it was a very peaceable population, but there was occasional violence or robbery, and the need for local law-enforcement gradually became apparent.

The first courthouse was built in 1873, when John Boyd was the Government Agent. It consisted of a small whitewashed log cabin with a central courtroom, and jail cells opening directly on the side. It was at the extreme west end of town, beyond Thomas Spelman's Cosmopolitan Hotel, built a few years later.

It served as a general office, as Boyd attended to all government business for the district. He was soon succeeded by John Ussher, who was murdered in 1879 by the McLean brothers; then George Christie Tunstall took over the office.

Meantime, during CPR survey and construction, Kamloops developed into a small town, and the courthouse was recognised as quite inadequate. In 1885 Tunstall chose a new site at what was then the east end of town - the corner of Victoria and First Avenue.

This too was a wooden building, but considerably larger, and was the pride of Kamloops at that stage. Apart from its intended function, it was used for meetings, as the Social Club's ballroom, and for Presbyterian and Methodist services until 1888, when both groups built their own churches.

The jail was a separate building adjoining the courthouse, with jailer James A. Sinclair. He later homesteaded on Campbell Range, and Hugh McLean took over the jail.

After incorporation in 1893, City Council used the courthouse for its meetings; they later built the City Hall in front of the old buildings. The jail continued in use until 1938, when the Provincial Police took over jurisdiction, and it was demolished.

Meantime the first courthouse was still in existence, being used for various small meetings and for practices of Kamloops Band. But in 1902 it was destroyed in a spectacular fire which started in an old house built about 1875 by W. B. Wilson, spread immediately to the courthouse and the long-deserted Mara & Wilson store, and then engulfed the Cosmopolitan Hotel and stables, with loss of one life.

The 1885 courthouse and jail were soon outgrown; grand juries repeatedly condemned the inadequate facilities. In 1897 the government built a new jail south of the City, near the Provincial Home, erected three years earlier. J. R. Vicars was appointed Warden, and Alex G. Brown was the jailer.

F. S. Hussey was appointed Government Agent in 1886, when Tunstall was transferred to Granite Creek as Gold Commissioner. Later Hussey became Superintendent of Provincial Police, and Tunstall returned

to Kamloops as Government Agent until his retirement in 1909. Wentworth F. Wood was Sheriff from 1905 until his retirement in 1934, at the age of 81.

replaced by Begbie
 County Court and Assizes had been held irregularly in Kamloops during the 1870s under Peter O'Reilly. During the next ten years Walkem was usually the visiting judge, followed by Spinks, and by Swanson after 1910.

Most trials were relatively quiet, but there were a few spectacular events, one of the best known being that of Bill Miner and Associates in 1906. There seem to have been about 20 hangings, the first in 1886, when almost the whole town attended, and the last in 1916. Most involved crimes that took place far from Kamloops, but Frank Spencer was hanged in 1890 for the murder of Peter Foster at Louis Campbell's ranch, and Casimir in 1899 for the cold-blooded shooting of Philip Walker near the North Thompson bridge.

In 1907 the Government granted \$20,000 for a new courthouse and offices, built at the corner of Seymour and First Avenue. This building has remained more or less unchanged, except for the recent addition of the land registry office. *later*