

A long history of significant firsts

Kamloops broke a lot of ground

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Kamloops is a city with a long history of significant firsts. This article is not intended as an exhaustive list but will focus on a number of the early and perhaps more interesting "firsts" for the city.

There are two kinds of firsts to consider. One kind of first is an event or person that was the first of its kind in the city. The other is an event or person in Kamloops and district that was the first for B.C. or Canada.

The first people in the area, of course, were the Shuswap Indians, who have lived here for about 9,000 years. The first white people that they saw were David Stuart and Alexander Ross of the American-owned Pacific Fur Company.

They arrived in 1811 and the fort that the company established at Kamloops in 1812 was the first white settlement in the southern interior of B.C. This was also the only inland fur trading post in B.C. founded by American interests.

One of the early gold discoveries in B.C. that precipitated the gold rush was at Tranquille Creek in 1857. Donald McLean, the Hudson's Bay Company trader at Kamloops, is said to have obtained gold from Indians along the Thompson River as early as 1856.

The group of gold seekers called the Overlanders, who trekked across the continent to B.C. in 1862, supplied a number of firsts for this region. Catherine Schubert, the only woman in the group, was the first white woman in the area. As well, her daughter Rose, who was born here on Oct. 14, 1862, was the first white child born in the district.

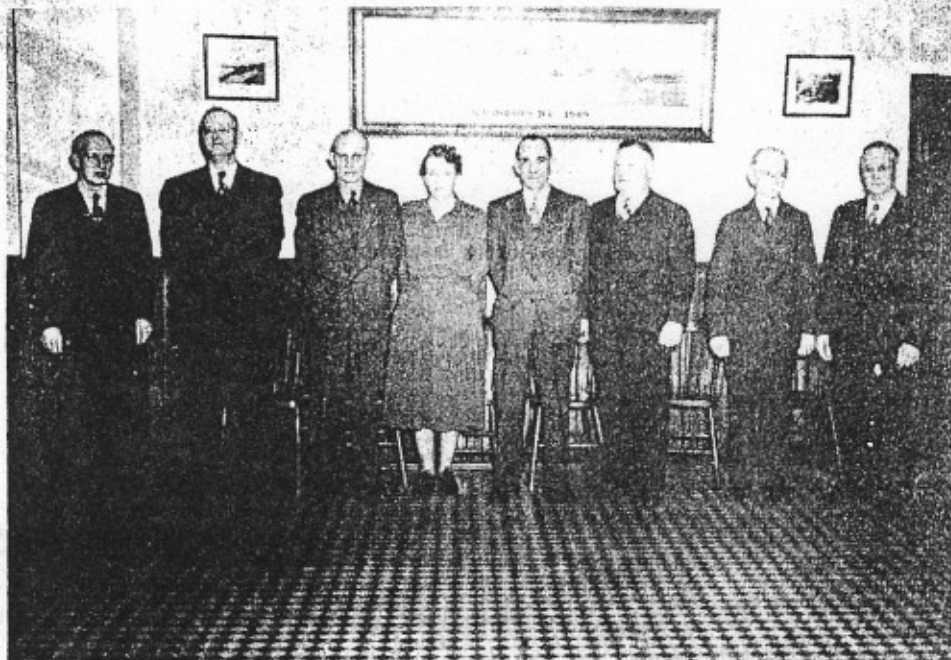
Another Overlander, William Fortune, built the first private dwelling in Kamloops for the winter of 1862-63. In 1868 he was a partner in the first sawmill in the area at Tranquille. In addition, Isaac Brock McQueen, after whom McQueen Lake is named, became the first lumberman in the region when he built the first paddlewheel boat on the Thompson River in 1865.

Also among the Overlanders was J.A. Mara, who later became a Kamloops merchant, shipowner, provincial MLA and federal MP. He was one of the land speculators who developed the townsite of Kamloops in the 1860s and was the most powerful man in the region for many years.

This year is the centennial of a number of important events. The first Anglican Church in Kamloops was built in 1884 and the Kamloops Fire Brigade was organized the same year. The Kamloops School District is celebrating a centennial this year as well. The first school in what is now School District No. 24 was established at Shuswap Prairie, between Pritchard and Chase, in November of 1884.

The first school in Kamloops was a private school in the home of Neville Roper in 1878. The North Thompson School District was organized in August of 1884 and the North Thompson School was established at Rayleigh in December of 1885. This was the first public school within the present city boundaries.

The first teacher at that school was Margaret Dallas (Dallas is not named after her), later Mrs. Slavin, and she was a passenger on the first through passenger train from the east in July of 1886.



Kamloops Museum photo

HELEN MILLWARD became the first woman elected to Kamloops City Council in 1948.

Kamloops, as a transportation and communications centre, has a number of firsts worth mentioning. The first newspaper in the city was the Inland Sentinel, now called the Kamloops Sentinel. It was originally based at Emory Bar near Yale during Canadian Pacific Railway construction in 1880. The paper was moved to Kamloops in 1884 and this year also marked its 100th year here.

Jean Saucier installed the first telephone in the city in 1888 to communicate between his store and his home. That same year he started a telephone company, making Kamloops one of the earliest communities in western Canada with telephone service.

CFJC Radio began in 1926 as the first radio station in Kamloops and the B.C. Interior. In 1957, the same company started broadcasting as the first television station in the Interior.

The first automobile in the B.C. Interior was owned by Archie Clemes of Spences Bridge in

1900. In November of 1905, the Stevens and Allen Grocery Store owners registered their delivery truck as the first motor vehicle in Kamloops.

It has always been thought that the first airplane in Kamloops landed on the Indian Reserve in 1919 but one may have landed at the Cooney ranch at Tranquille in 1918.

Women have come a long way since 1873 when Christine McKenzie of Kamloops became the first female storekeeper in B.C. The first woman elected to public office in Kamloops was Margaret Clements who joined the school board in 1914. That same year saw Emily Beattie appointed as the first female school principal in the district. Beattie School, of course, is named after her and her sisters, all teachers.

Helen Millward was elected as the first woman alderman in Kamloops in 1948. When her son Peter, who is now a judge, joined her on council in 1957, they were probably the first mother and son team on city council.

In 1940, Margaret McNab of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, since renamed the New Democratic Party, was the first woman to run in a federal election in this riding. Pat Wallace, the Liberal candidate in last summer's election, was only the second woman to run federally. As yet, no woman has been nominated in this riding for a provincial election.

Kamloops has a number of significant political firsts to its credit. John Fremont Smith, who served on city council from 1903 to 1908, was the first black man elected in B.C. or perhaps Canada. Phil Gaglardi in 1952 became the first B.C. cabinet minister of Italian descent. From 1966 to 1972 Peter Wing was mayor of Kamloops and was the first, and still only, Chinese mayor in North America.

Finally, as most people know, Len Marchand, now Senator Marchand, was elected from Kamloops in 1968 as the first native Indian to Canadian Parliament.

New firsts are always being added, it seems. This summer Tom LaRoche became the Karate International Kickboxing welterweight champion, our first world champion athlete.



Kamloops Museum photo

PETER WING was North America's first mayor of Chinese descent. He is pictured here with his wife, Kim, and his parents, Leung and Eng Wing.