

Museum prepares move into the new millennium

By **SUSAN CROSS**
Kamloops Museum clerk

PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS needed to remember their past. Whether through stories passed from generation to generation around the campfire or with photographs, articles and written accounts.

For over 60 years now, the Kamloops Museum Association has taken on the daunting task of preserving our city's history and sharing it with its citizens through the means of a public museum. History that is not collected and preserved is history lost. The dedication of the Kamloops Museum Association continues as the museum enters a new century, with an ever-expanding collection.

In 1936, Kamloops high school teacher J.J. Morse recognized the need to collect early accounts of the city's development. As a result, he formed the Thompson Valley District Museum and Historical Association. After determining the association's collections policy, they set out to collect books, artifacts, First Nations items, photos, logs and diaries from the Thompson River valleys.

Now with a quickly growing collection, the association

was eager to display the newly found treasures, but where? The answer came in the form of an old Hudson's Bay Fort cabin, discovered by museum director David Power. With the generous assistance of the Hudson's Bay store, the log building was restored to become the first Kamloops Museum, opening in 1937 in Riverside Park. The quaint little cabin was bursting at the seams with generous donations of artifacts from the public.

By 1939, with the museum directors actively pursuing historical donations and no storage space available, it became clear that a new and larger facility was required. Co-incidentally, that year also saw the Kamloops Public Library without a home, as it was given notice to vacate the Federal Building it shared with the Post Office.

The generosity of Mrs. J.S. Burris was to solve the dilemma for both institutions. Burris was the daughter of Kamloops pioneer James McIntosh, mill owner, founder of the first waterworks and the first police magistrate when the city incorporated in 1893. She offered a large, attractive house at 207 Seymour St. to be jointly used by the museum and library. After a few minor alterations and new wiring, the museum and library building was opened to the public on April 29, 1939, with Burris serving as the guest of honour.

The 1887 house, built by R.E. Smith, one of the city's first aldermen, would see title vested in the Corporation of the City of Kamloops to be used jointly by the museum and the library. The library was located on the lower floor and the museum was upstairs. The expanded exhibits included T.S. Keyes taxidermy display, First Nation's artifacts, a rock and mineral collection, Hudson's Bay Company memorabilia and a large collection of photos, most of which are still on display today.

At this time the association changed it's name to Kamloops Museum Association. They staffed the museum with seniors and school volunteers. However, by the end of 1939, the board complained that much of the work fell to the president, vice-president and secretary.

In 1946 concerns were raised about the possibility of a fire in the old wooden structure and a campaign began to get a fire-proof building for the museum's valuable collections. As well, the increasing yearly attendance warranted more space yet again, with 1954 attendance recorded at 30,000.

In December 1956 a bylaw was passed by city taxpayers to authorize a new library-museum-restroom building to be built by the city. Although the new museum was indeed larger, it was already too small for community needs. The



THE FIRST Kamloops Museum in Riverside Park, top photo, 1937. Bottom photo shows the Una McIntosh-Burris house, used as a museum and library in 1939.

curator complained about a lack of storage and workspace.

A centennial year project in 1966 saw Fort Kamloops constructed at the east end of Riverside Park. This summer museum site provided storage for many of the larger artifacts owned by the museum. In 1972, when the Thompson River flooded the wooden fort, many artifacts were destroyed. The crumbling fort was dismantled, with some of the lumber used to construct a children's playground in McArthur Park.

In 1978, the library moved to a vacated grocery store site in Kamloops Square, next to the museum. Tragically, a large fire at the new library all but destroyed their entire collection in 1979.

With the relocation of the library, the association hoped to fill the entire building with artifacts presently in storage. This was not to be as the space was allocated to the Kamloops Public Art Gallery and the museum had to be content with renovations made on the second floor. This was the last major change to the exhibits to date.

In 1998, the art gallery moved out of the basement floor of the museum. The Kamloops Museum Association board saw this as an opportunity to develop long-term plans for the museum with the help of professional museum consultants. After many requests from the local organization for space, it was time for a new plan. The consultants will work with the Kamloops Museum Association, museum staff, the city and the general public to determine the museum's role in the next century.

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