

BILL SARGENT

1891

Bill Sargent tells the story of how his grandfather settled in Nova Scotia.

"Well, my grandfather came to Canada with an English regiment into Halifax. He was a lieutenant, I think. He bought a house in Halifax and he married my grandmother who was from an old Halifax family. I think they were Empire Loyalists stock and my grandfather joined a church and became an Anglican Minister.

"Yes, he came to Canada about 1867, then a few years later they decided to go west into Saskatchewan. I think all my father's family were born in Nova Scotia or else Prince Edward Island where he ministered but they had this one family which he took out west, this was ahead of the CPR.

"They went by railroad - the Grand Trunk Railroad from Halifax to Toronto and then they went south into the States and went through Minneapolis. I don't think there was a railroad north to Winnipeg. I think they took the Red River Carts. My father was about four years of age when this happened. He grew up in southern Saskatchewan. My grandfather eventually became Dean of QueAppelle. When my father was 18 he finished his schooling and was ready to go to work. He joined the Hudson's Bay Company in 1891.

"Yes, he was sent by the company to Victoria along with some other recruits they had, and he was sent to the Hazelton post.

"I don't think there was that much excitement. There were very few people here. I know I've seen the Hudson's Bay diary from 1894 or 1895. I'm not sure which one it was. It lists all the people who had dinner at the Hudson Bay Fort on Christmas Day and it lists all the people that were here and I think there were 11 people that weren't Indian and two Chinamen. That was the total white population of Hazelton in mid-winter of 1894."

Mr. Sargent came by steamer from Victoria to Prince Rupert. He then travelled by Indian freight canoes. These were large canoes and had several men pulling them up the river. This was how they got their freight into the country to supply the miners in America and stock for trading with local people.

Mr. Sargent recalls that, "The telegraph was completed from Hazelton to Dawson City in 1898 or 99, after the gold rush in the Klondike. The gold rush wasn't local, but was in the Omenica

country, 15 miles east of here. This was the closest they could get water transportation to the gold field. The southern route from Yale at the head of Fraser navigation was a much longer pack train trip. There were a lot of mines up from the Cariboo and they kept going further north to new fields although Omenica gold mine wasn't as successful or famous as the Klondike. This rush for gold went on for about 10 years from late 1870 - early 1880's, while the Klondike rush was in 1898-1899 and pretty well over by 1905. It was long enough to put Hazelton on the map.

After the gold rush came the Telegraph Trail and the telegraph line was serviced north of Hazelton until 1930. About 1930 or 31 they abandoned the land line to use radio for communication.

Pack trains were contracted by the BX Company in Ashcroft. They would bring horses and mules to Hazelton in the spring and pack them into Omenica all summer, then back to the Cariboo for winter because there was more feed and less snow in the Cariboo.

In 1895 the BX Company decided to go out of the pack train business, but the Hudson's Bay still needed pack trains so they bought the outfit and moved it to Hazelton. Mr. Sargent was in charge of the post at that time. With a "It's yours, you look after it" from the Hudson's Bay Company, Mr. Sargent was faced with the problem of securing enough feed to winter the stock. There were no other horses in the country at that time.

Cataline came along with the train and was hired by the Hudson's Bay Company to be chief packer. With Cataline came Dave Wiggins, the son of a black father and an Indian woman from Chilcotin. He was experienced around pack horses and a younger man than Cataline. Cataline packed for Hudson's Bay from 1895 to 1900 at which time the Omenica business had just about disappeared and miners had headed for the Klondike. Cataline continued to pack for the telegraph line.

One a winter Mr. Sargent, as a junior clerk, along with two others, would walk to Kitimat to get the mail. He would follow the river on the ice with snow shoes.

Bill says, "The reason they went to Kitimat was because they could get a water grade right down to the tide. You see,

the Skeena is a big estuary and there is not any good ice below Kivinitza to about half way between Terrace and Port Essington so they couldn't follow the trail, for it was so bad."

The mail was brought from Victoria to Kitimat by steamer. Mail was mostly letters and probably newspapers and a big pack was brought back by the three of them. They may have used dog teams but it was all in a day's work.

From 1900, the railway was the biggest business. "It was about 1905 I think, the first sort of preliminary surveys for the railways were being done. And once the speculation that there was going to be a railway through the valley that kept the people interested, kept them here. Even if the business in the Omenica had died off, they were expecting the railway construction you see. Of course, the preliminary surveys they look over every possible route and you never knew where it was going to end up. It's like the present Alaskan pipeline, whether it's going to go through the Mackenzie Valley or come down the Alcan Highway or come down through Kitimat; it could be either one. They knew they were going to go down the mouth of the Skeena.

"I don't know when the actual prairie part of the construction was done, but I think it started from Winnipeg. This end of the construction when they settled on a route they thought it was going to come down the Bulkly and down the Skeena. Then, of course, the final surveys were made and construction started about 1909 or 1910.

"As the construction started they had gangs in here as soon as they were anywhere in the country because they had the bridge at Skeena Crossing to build. They could get freight and traffic up to here by the steam boats and they could get their supplies. So they had men working from here eastward, from Skeena Crossing and they had these tunnels to build up on the other side of New Hazelton which was quite a length of a chore so they worked from here eastward and, of course, they worked from Prince Rupert eastward, too.

"They worked eastward and westward from the town site of Seeley, down to where the Seeley Gulf Station was. There were thousands of men in all the camps building railway tressels over Seeley Gulch. The workers were all nationalities. There weren't too

many Orientals on the construction. There was so much talk about the Chinese when the CPR was built they weren't allowing any Chinese labour into the country."

During this time a bank robbery took place and about \$65,000 disappeared and was never recovered. There was another robbery a year later - both from the bank in New Hazelton.

The telegraph line was started in 1898 and finished in 1899 and was strung all the way to Dawson City, five or six hundred miles away. Cabins were built every 20 or 30 miles. The country was rough and most of the time insulators were just nailed to trees. There was practically no machinery at all. Bill says, "I've seen pictures of them working at the Ross Tunnels and they had men driving steel with sledge hammers to make the holes to put the dynamite in; men with shovels and wheel barrows to carry out the broken rock. Then, when they were making grade, all they had was horse drawn scrapers. That took a lot of men." After the grade was made they had to lay the ties and then the rails.

Bill Sargent went to school in Hazelton where there were a number of schools: One where Smokey Morrison now lives, the old United Church was a school, an old log mission behind the Anglican Church housed one, one in the Salvation Army Hall and one in the old power house. An old rented building next to the old drug store was the house of the high school until the new one was built in 1950. By this time the Native population was growing and they needed more classrooms. Five or six classrooms were used with the same number of teachers.

Bill and his sister Mary and Ethel Tomlinson were sent out to grade nine as there was no school here. Next year there were five or six others so the board hired a teacher. Bernie Hindle, Elma, Cox, Neil Sterrett were among the students. The following year, more graduated to grade nine, which gave a full high school with students in nine, ten and eleven. High school consisted of three years in those days. You went to university after that. These three grades were in one room.

When Bill's daughter, Sally, started to school, she went to the same school as Bill had gone to and even sat in the same desk.

Charlie Janzi and a few others were telegraphers on the

telegraph line. They also did a lot of trapping while out on the line. It was a lonely life, but a necessary one.

Bill recalls, "The original police force was the Provincial Police Force. The RCMP didn't come to take over the Provincial policing here until sometime in the 1950's or 1960's. They had a Provincial Police Force and I think that Kirby was one of the first Provincial Policemen stationed here. Then later came the Dutch Cline. His real name was Sperry Cline, but he was from, I guess, South Africa and then he was always called Dutch. He was the police here for all the time I was a boy and growing up - about the time I was five or six years old till I was fourteen or fifteen. In the earlier years he never wore a uniform. I don't think they had uniforms. He was just the Constable. He probably had a badge and that was it. But somewhere along the line, maybe in the early twenties they decided to spruce them up and provided them with Khaki uniforms, military uniforms. And then, eventually I think they had an RCMP detachment here for the Federal Policing, they were RCMP. Eventually to police on the Indian Reservation." He adds there was a Federal policeman, but the general policing was done by the Provincial police.

Bill tells of a truck brought in by O'Neil to be used as a packer. It was chain driven with solid rubber tires. It was a flat deck and benches were put on the back. It was used as a stage coach between Hazelton and Aldermiser. Later the truck was bought by McKay who had the livery stable which was taken over by Faulkner when McKay died. Marshall Brothers bought the same old truck from Faulkner and used it for awhile in 1927 or 28. Most of the transportationⁱⁿ those days was by horse drawn carts.

The bridge used by Bill was the one that went from the 'Ksan point to South Hazelton Railway Station.

The blacksmith's shop was an intriguing place for boys in those days. They loved to turn the forge wheel and make the sparks fly.

Bill thinks Hazelton changed with times and will continue to do so with the help of 'Ksan and other attractions which will put it on the tourist maps.