

After the First World War

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Craigdarroch Military Hospital: A Canadian War Story

- **The First Post Office in Dease Lake**
- **Japanese-Canadian Crusader Mary Keiko Kitagawa**
- **The Other Billie**
- **First Nations Languages**
- **Time Travels: Comox Air Force Museum**

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Lizette Allard Bouchie, an unidentified man, and Billie Boucher outside the Bouchie's home on the west side of the Fraser River, circa 1890.

Image I-60830 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives

The Other Billie

By Heloise Dixon-Warren

When one thinks of the Cariboo, William ("Billy") Barker and the discovery of gold in August 1862 quickly comes to mind. Today, much of the emphasis on the Cariboo's history is focused on the historic town of Barkerville and the opening up of the province through the Gold Rush. While the Gold Rush had an impressive impact on western Canada, the Cariboo was also opened up by voyageurs and farmers, by establishing communication lines, and by more than one William. Understanding our history brings communities together and gives people a reason to celebrate.

In the North Cariboo, 10 kilometres west of Quesnel lies the rural community of Bouchie Lake. Together with Milburn Lake, this unincorporated area known to some as Bouchie-Milburn is home to an estimated 2,000 to 2,500 people. Although the majority of the people live rurally on small-to-large acreages, the community has a village centre composed of a hall and recreation grounds, an elementary school, a volunteer fire department, three commercial businesses, and many home-based businesses. The majority of the current commercial structures replaced older structures that were built in the early 1900s. Some of the earlier

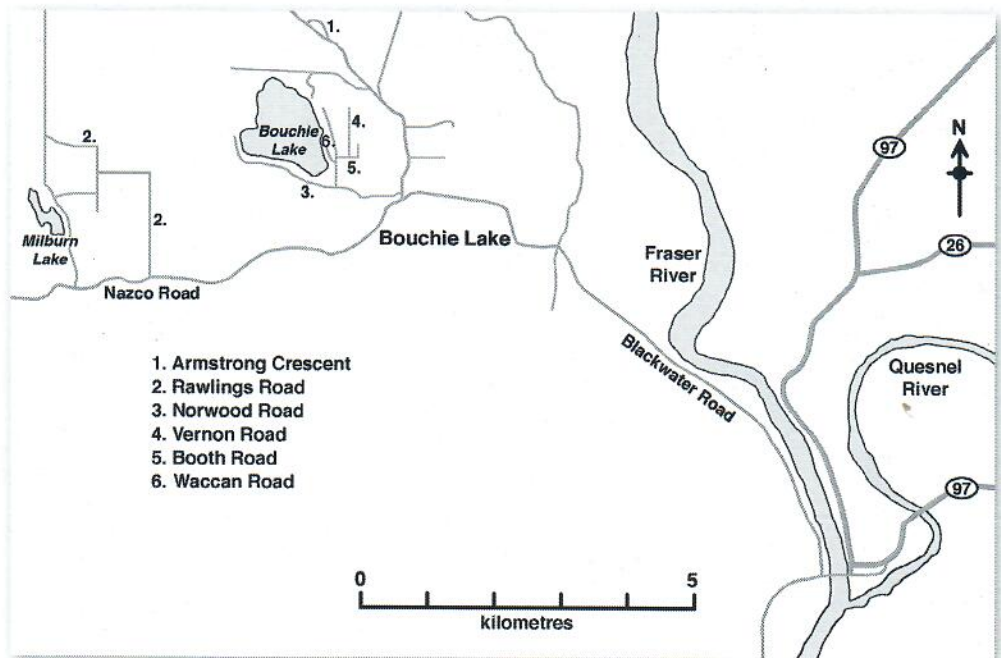
buildings succumbed to fire or were simply dismantled for other reasons. Some were relocated. Today, access to the community is via the Blackwater Road – a provincial highway that was straightened and upgraded in 1985. The speed on the Blackwater Road is 80 km an hour. It is likely fair to say that when most people drive through Bouchie Lake they give little thought as to why it is where it is, what was here before, or the people who were the original settlers.

Bouchie Lake is in the traditional territory of the Lhtako Dené First Nation people. The area was used by local First Nations people for traditional activities such as hunting, camping, and berry picking years before the voyageurs and/or early settlers travelled into the area. Long before there were highways, telephone lines, or telegraph trails, travel into the area of “Bouchie-Milburn” would have been via traditional First Nation trails. It is known that these original trails became the corridors that we travel on today. On the lake now known as Bouchie Lake, it is said that there were at least two First Nation campsites on the lakeshore. These were used by the local First Nations people travelling between the Blackwater Valley, Nazco, and Quesnel.

Following the cross-Canada expedition of Alexander MacKenzie with the North West Company (NWC) in 1793, the NWC gave Simon Fraser the task of exploring and further opening up the land for fur trading. After constructing Fort McLeod in 1805 (the first fort west of the Rocky Mountains), Fraser established Fort St. James and Fort Fraser both in 1806, and Fort George in 1807. These are communities that exist today and are known well by many people in North Central BC.

On May 22, 1808, Simon Fraser departed from Fort George with a crew of 23 people and four canoes to explore the river that was named after him. Travelling with Fraser was John Stuart (name-sake for Stuart Lake), Jules Maurice Quesnel, and Jean-Baptiste Boucher. It was Simon Fraser who later named the land New Caledonia and the river entering the Fraser River from the East in what is now Quesnel, the Quesnel River.

Jean-Baptiste Boucher is of particular interest when



Map of the Cariboo and location of Bouchie-Milburn.

Erica Williams

discussing the history of Bouchie Lake. Jean-Baptiste was Métis. He was born in 1789 in the Métis Homeland, known as Rupert’s Land — territory that included all or parts of present-day Northwest-Nunavut Territory, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. His father was French-Canadian and his mother Cree.¹ It is said he spoke both the languages of his parents, along with Carrier, and several others. He was a valued voyageur, interpreter, guide, and courier for the North West Company, and then the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) after the companies merged in 1821. One of Boucher’s duties was that of a policeman, and it is believed that his nickname “Waccan” is a derivative of watchman. Jean-Baptiste married the daughter of a Carrier chief in 1811 but that marriage did not last. His second marriage was to Nancy McDougall. Nancy had been born in Fort McLeod (1806) and was also Métis. She was the daughter of North West Company clerk James McDougall and an Athabaskan Sekani First Nations woman.

Waccan and Nancy had 17 children, some of whom also worked for the HBC. Boucher’s name was shortened and often spelled Bouche, Bouchie, or Buschie. Waccan died in 1849 and Nancy died sometime after 1871. Both are buried at Fort St. James. Waccan was the last surviving member of the Simon Fraser Expedition.

By 1821, the HBC had established Fort Alexandria to the south of Quesnel. Travelling north of Quesnel to the more northern forts, the route included the hills north and west of the Fraser River. Six miles out on the trail, the pack trains are said to have rested on a grassy



First school at Bouchie Lake on Blackwater Road. The teacher was Miss E. Bruneau, and she had 17 pupils, 9 boys and 8 girls, 1922.

Image B-06870 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives

meadowland with a stream flowing nearby. This creek was later named Bouchie Creek and the lake that it flowed out of, Bouchie Lake.

In 1864–65, the Collins Overland Telegraph Trail was being constructed with the aim to connect North America with Europe via a telegraph. By the summer of 1865, and under the direction of Mr. Perry Collins, the telegraph crew had completed a line as far as Quesnel and had cleared a right of way west of Quesnel, likely following First Nation trails, to Fort Fraser. In the spring of 1866, telegraph wire was strung out from Quesnel northwest to the confluence of the Bulkley and Skeena Rivers. From this time onwards, travel through what became Bouchie Lake was via the Telegraph Trail.

Fast forward to the early 1900s when William Boucher, one of the younger sons of Jean-Baptiste Boucher, and his wife Lizette Allard Boucher decided they wanted more land. William “Billie” was born in Fort Alexandria in 1828.² As a young man, he was employed by the Hudson’s Bay Company at Fort Alexandria and later as a courier, travelling between Fort St. James and Steveston (on the coast) on the Telegraph Trail and wagon roads.

Lizette was born in 1842 at the coast. Her father was Joseph Allard, a Hudson’s Bay Company middleman who spent most of his career in New Caledonia. Her mother was Marie, an Indigenous woman from the Fort George area.³ Billie and Lizette Allard were married



The May 26, 2018 Billie Bouchie Day Celebrations.

Photographer, Dave Sutton

The Crown Grant Papers can be viewed online through the Province of British Columbia Government Access Tool for Online Retrieval (GATOR): a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/gator/crowngrantdetail.do?grantId=029269

at St. Joseph's Mission in Williams Lake in 1864. The young Bouchers lived in Quesnelle Mouth where they pre-empted land on the flats on the west bank of the Fraser River (West Quesnel) to farm. Billie not only developed a productive farm but was also the ferry man transporting people and freight across the Fraser River. Billie and Lizette had seven children. When they reached school age, Billie would ferry them across the Fraser River to attend the school in Quesnel.

On May 27, 1902, William (a.k.a. Billie) Bouchie and Lizette pre-empted 320 acres in Bouchie Lake. They paid \$1.00 an acre for land that was surveyed and by doing so, became Bouchie Lake's first permanent settlers. On the Crown Grant Papers, their land, known as L729 is transected from southeast to northwest by the Telegraph Trail. L729 exists today, although it has been subdivided in areas. What is of interest is that the location of the Telegraph Trail is exactly where the Blackwater Road is today. Bouchie Creek, which flows behind the Bouchie Lake Elementary School, is also shown on the map.

Billie and Lizette resided on the farm in Bouchie Lake until 1914. Billie died on July 29, 1921 at the age of 90 and Lizette died in February 1938 at the age of 95.⁴ Both are buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in Quesnel.

Other families moved into the area after Billie and Lizette. Stores, schools and halls were constructed — the majority of them by residents of the community. Many of the roads in Bouchie-Milburn reflect the presence of these pioneer families — e.g., Rawlings Road, Sanford Road, Armstrong Crescent, Norwood Road, Vernon Road, and Booth Road. It was not until recently that the significance of Waccan Road on Bouchie Lake was understood by some of us. Some of these pioneering families still have relatives who live in the area, while others have moved on to make their homes elsewhere.

Until recently, the history of Bouchie Lake as a community was not well known by many. On May 25 and 26, 2018, the Billie Bouchie Day Celebrations, hosted by the Friends of Bouchie-Milburn Society, endeavoured to change the community's understanding of itself. This event was a Celebration of our Community and Heritage. It focused on the contribution that the Métis, First Nations, and early settlers made to the community and region as a whole. To understand where we are



The May 26, 2018 Billie Bouchie Day Celebrations.

Photographer, Lizzy Hay

going and our opportunities, we must know where we have come from.

The Friends of Bouchie-Milburn Society now look forward to "Billie Bouchie Day Celebrations" in 2019 and how, again, a celebration can be planned that will raise the profile of our community's history amongst its own residents. ■



Heloise Dixon-Warren is a resident of Bouchie-Milburn and has been for the last 16 years. When she moved to the North Cariboo in 2002 she thought she was moving to Quesnel as that is the postal address used by Canada Post. Over the years, Heloise has learned that she lives in a community outside of Quesnel — a community with its own identity, history and flavour. Heloise and her husband, Ted, own Moose Meadows Farm and a local Country Store in addition

to being both Registered Professional Foresters and employed by the Province of BC. Heloise is actively engaged in her community as a volunteer and is a passionate advocate for it. She is Secretary with the Friends of Bouchie-Milburn and looks forward to the group taking on more projects that celebrate the community and its heritage.

Endnotes

1. "Jean-Baptiste Boucher Biography," Quesnel & District Museum & Archives, <http://www.quesnelmuseum.ca/RiverofMemory/Frasers-Expedition/Waccan/boucher.html>.
2. The 1828 date is from *Pioneers of Bouchie Lake*, Bouchie Lake Women's Institute, 1975; the 1833 date is from *A Tribute to the Past — Quesnel & Area, 1808-1928*, Old Age Pensioner's Organization, Branch #77, Quesnel, BC, 1985.
3. Bruce McIntyre Watson, "Allard, Joseph (b) (c. 1820 - c. 1873) (Canadian: French)," *Lived West of the Divide: A Biographical Dictionary of Fur Traders Working West of the Rockies, 1793-1858*, 166. Second source: *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Library and Archives Canada, 2013. Series RG31. Statistics Canada Fonds: father listed as Alair, born in Manitoba, her origin as French.
4. "British Columbia Death Registrations, 1872-1986; 1992-1993," William Walker Bouchie, 1924. "British Columbia Death Registrations, 1872-1986; 1992-1993," Elizabeth Bouchie, 1938.