

James Halbold Christie Lest We Forget

BY GRACE WORTH

My husband and I settled in Trinity Valley, in the mountains north-east of Vernon, B.C. on June 29th, 1901. I remember that the rain poured down on that day and for six weeks thereafter we got no more, and it was a very hot summer. Being accustomed to the English climate, the extreme heat and the mosquitoes gave me a miserable time.

After becoming acclimatized, I became interested in the names of the physical features of our Valley. I had heard different versions of the names, but most old-timers agreed that they had been given by Jim Christie who discovered the Valley. Different people had given me different explanations.

Mrs. Deschamps of Lumby, B.C. told me that when the road was being first put in, several French Canadian men worked on it, and it seemed to take such a long time to reach the end of the surveyors' layout, they named it Eternity Valley. But of course it had been named before the road began.

Although Mr. Christie and I were contemporary inhabitants of the Okanagan for over forty years, I did not meet or correspond with him until he was an old man. He told me that he entered Trinity Valley by following up a creek from the south end of Mabel Lake. He stood on a high mound of land somewhere near the place that afterwards became the home of the Saunders family.

From there he could see three mountain ranges, and as the discoverers were a man, his dog and his pony, he decided to name it Trinity Valley. Being the son of a clergyman, he apparently knew something about Hell, for the creek that ran into Mabel Lake he called the Styx, ". . . as I had a hell of a time making my way up". Being a true Scot, the mountain on his left he called Bobbie Burns; further west he found several lakes which were called Christie Lakes.

Lossie Creek ran by our house, and many people thought it was called Lossie because part of its course went underground in summer. Others thought it was called after his dog Lassie, but Mr. Christie said, "I called it after the River Lossie in Scotland. We lived on one side of the Lossie, and Ramsay MacDonald's family lived on the other side in one of the cottages on the Christie estate". Ramsay MacDonald having been born in 1866 must have been a very small boy when Jim Christie, who was related to the Christie Biscuit people, left Scotland for Canada in 1871.

In answering my letter about place names, he did not give me the information I asked for, but his letter reveals that he was far from satisfied with his personal circumstances in his old age, and anxious to bring about socialism in Canada. He says, "Dear Friend: I received your letter of enquiry months ago. I should have been delighted at the time to reply, but under living conditions with me here at the Refuge, I have found it impossible to carry on correspondence. For several weeks I was really under a cloud, you may call it flu, general weakness, or town contamination, or what you may wish to call it, in fact severe colds, one on top of the other, but this last ten days practically crawling from under the effects. With the exception of my eyes which trouble me somewhat, I am really getting into shape again.

"I am engaged at present with going to war against the town and war really on account

of the manner of abuse which I have suffered this last winter. There is one old veteran in the country who will give them a run for their money on present conditions imposed.

I will appreciate it very much should you be in town, if you would drop in and see me. There is much to be talked over and absolutely necessary to do something towards giving the common people in line with the C.C.F. that would carry the people forward to a new fighting front for a new Earth. Whilst arranging for the new Earth, we may as well incorporate a portion of a new heaven that can be enjoyed here quite oblivious to the time when we are expected to sprout wings.

"There is no use fighting locally for changed conditions until we have some means in the way of a publication to maintain the public's interest in any movement for the betterment of the race. And I am personally determined to become a local Isaiah or a John



JIM CHRISTIE and DOG PAT

the Baptist. Get out on the high-ways and by-ways and trust to the ravens and crows to provide me a modicum of sustenance. I would dearly like to put in a night with the people of Trinity, could I overcome the lack of transport. Until I have the pleasure of meeting you somewhere, wishing you all luck and good wishes. Respectfully, J. H. Christie”.

Jim Christie is worthy of more than Canada ever gave him. The best years of his life were given to weaving the warp and woof of that canvas which illustrates our territory, and of helping to mix the “cement” which joined together the country we know as Canada.

The first time I visited him at “The Refuge” he asked me if I would write of his life in Canada. I promised to do so and in honor of his memory I will try to tell his story as he told it to me, enhanced by other reliable sources.

He promised to prepare material for me which would help me do the job, and he kept his promise. But the authorities who should have reserved such material were either simple-minded and lacking in their sense of value of historical facts for a growing country, or they were afraid of the revelations contained therein, for it was destroyed.

At the time of Mr. Christie’s death, Mr. C. W. Morrow (now Judge Morrow) was the Official Administrator. I wrote Judge Morrow to ask if it was possible for me to obtain any of this material, and the significant part of his answer was “I have had no luck with my search re the estate of Jim Christie; there have been two changes in the Office of the Official Administrator, and such things as scrap books, etc., seem to have been destroyed long since. Jim had a particularly interesting set of old clippings, which I went through very carefully, and they told a tremendously interesting story of the early days here, and would have been of supreme value to you in your endeavours.”

This destruction has given me a lot of work in the way of research and taken much of my time, which is getting short. But perhaps this loss is for the best, as in the course of searching I have been made aware of the fact, that unlike the Okanagan, the State of Washington, and indeed the North West States of the American Continent treasure the memory of Jim Christie. Mount Christie in Washington is named after him, and much has been written of his achievements, some of which I shall include later.

Although I had corresponded with Mr. Christie for some time, I did not meet him until 1937. He must have been about 85 years of age at that time. He was in what appeared to be an empty store on Barnard Avenue in Vernon. There was a provincial election on and



This is MOUNT CHRISTIE, Washington State, which honours the name of our Canadian explorer. Our thanks for this picture goes to Washington State Historical Society.

