

They Trod A Merry Measure

By George Murray

The aristocracy of the famous old Cariboo Road turned out in best "bib and tucker" last month in Clinton for the sixty-sixth annual Clinton ball. This event, held annually since 1868, is the social outing for the year, and many old Cariboo friendships and acquaintances are renewed only at such gatherings. Guests come from far and near, by train, automobile, sleighs, horseback and on foot. An unusually heavy fall of snow, which was followed by a Chinook made traveling difficult. Fourteen cars from Lillooet were unable to get through. All those arriving from the North came on horseback or train. Cars got through the road from Ashcroft, but snow-choked roads held up Kamloops and Savonna parties.

While many of the old-timers were absent their places were taken by grandsons and granddaughters, and in some instances by great-grandchildren. Mr. James B. Leighton, who, on the occasion of the Clinton ball of 1870 married Miss Uren of Barkerville, was absent this year and sent his regrets. Mrs. Edward Dougherty sr. of Maiden Creek, Cariboo Road and now at Vancouver was unable at the last minute to come. With her husband and five charming daughters, this popular matron attended most of the Clinton gatherings in the old days.

The five Dougherty girls, the old-timers recall, were much in demand because of the shortage at some of the annual balls of sufficient numbers of the fair sex to go around. With women in the minority, the plan was to encourage as many girls as possible to remain until the end of the dance. The musicians, including Alphonse Hautier, violinist, would take delight, therefore, in keeping for the very end of the programme the favorite dance of Ed. Dougherty, which was the Flying Dutchman or Danish polka.

Sometimes the fiddlers held off calling this particular polka until Ed. Dougherty would threaten to go home and take his handsome family with him. Then the fiddlers would tune up the Flying Dutchman. Everyone would clear the floor. Ed. would throw off his big fur coat, take his wife in his arms and they would dance it together as no other couple in the Cariboo could. He was always sure to stay then until the dance was over, Alphonse Hautier recalls. His two sons, Ed. jr. and Charley, ably fill the role at all the annual affairs, the latter attending the sixty-sixth with his own handsome wife and five daughters, who fully hold the Dougherty family tradition.

No old-time dance was complete without many quadrilles. Bill Boyd and Jack Stewart would call them off in style fitting the Cariboo Road. The Doyd family was represented this year by Jack and his wife, who rode forty-three miles by saddle horse from the Flying U. Miss Rita Cunningham, daughter of Jack Cunningham, was as graceful on the ballroom floor as she is in her famous saddle and rode horseback twenty miles to attend.

Smith is more than just a name in Clinton, where the late Joe Smith made history during the early days when he owned and operated the hotel. It was in his billiard room that the very first ball was held in 1868. The dance was such a success that the following year preparations were begun far ahead for the next ball. Tickets in the old days cost \$5 per couple. That included horse feed and stabling for one or four horses, bed and meals and two nights' entertainment and dancing. As the popularity of these dances grew with years, the celebration spun out into weeks and became at the height of its popularity the most happy event of the year on the Cariboo Road. After two days of merry-making at Clinton, the crowd journeyed to Mundorff's at Twenty-mile and stopped a night for dancing, then on to Ashcroft, where even two nights did not satisfy them, then on to Spences Bridge and Lytton and back by Lillooet to Clinton, to disperse for another year. Joe Smith lived long and happily to see the results of his inspiration. His descendents have faithfully kept up the interest in the old-timers ball each consecutive year.

If Ed. Dougherty demanded the Flying Dutchman, other old-timers had their own special dances, which they insisted should be on the programme. Doc English of Ashcroft loved the measures of the Valse Soviana. Unless this was included and an encore along with it, Doc English would consider the evening lost. Phil Parkes always waited for the Mazurka before stepping out in real earnest at a Clinton ball. Mr. Hautier of Lytton, who fiddled at fifty of the annual balls at Clinton, says there never was a record of ungentlemanly conduct at one of these social events. Sometimes hardened miners were in attendance, but firearms were always left outside. The men from the creeks and ranches, from railway construction or the rivers were the soul of chivalry on such occasions.

The nearest thing to incivility noted by Mr. Hautier in his experience was the conduct of a swain who had ridden a saddle horse 150 miles from the Okanogan. This gentleman had an exceedingly baldhead. When he made his bow in the dance hall he was late and the ladies had filled their programmes. He approached one after the other for a dance and was refused. Whereupon he started out the rounds of the ladies afresh in.....the annual dance of the following year.

Among old-timer musicians at the Clinton affair was a man who came via Dead Man's Creek from the Loon Lake neighborhood horseback. He carried his violin strapped to his back. He entered the ballroom in full buckskin raiment punctually at the opening of the dance and played exceedingly well until the close of the affair that year. Others recall that the merriest music played at one of the annual gatherings of long ago was provide by a young man who later died in the scaffold, charged with murder.

In the early days the dance began at 8 o'clock sharp. Everyone was on time. The grand march and the Circassian circle led off the merry-makers, and it was indeed a parade of handsome men and women of beauty and spirit. There were a handful of men who brought with them from the old land swallowtail suits and they wore them. One Scotchman who had his kilts brought them out, despite the fun and jokes that were made at his expense.

The sixty-sixth annual ball did not begin until 10 o'clock. The grand march was held just before the supper-dance held at midnight. Mr. Frank Engeman was master of ceremonies and called off some fine quadrilles. The first part of the evening was given over to modern music and dancing. The supper has always been a pride of the old-time ball. Hot roast turkey, in quantity with all the trimmings, even to the third helping, graced the tables. Dancing continued until 6 o'clock in the morning, and the descendants of the old-time musicians were still going strong at broad daylight. Instead of the first and second violins which were played for so many good old years by Geordie Tinker and Alphonse Hautier respectively, we listened to a banjo and a guitar. Saxophone and traps took the place of the piccolo, without which no old-time dance orchestra was complete. George Ballie mastered the piccolo in the old days, while he also directed the dancing. Bill Brown, in the 'seventies, was a popular celloist. There was always an organ in the old days, and Mrs. Bell sr. was the organist.

It was the usual custom to serve breakfast after the ball. Nourished with good food and cheered with hot toddy, which was part of the festival ceremony, the musicians of former days, the singers and admirers would set out about the town of Clinton to serenade the ladies. Woe to those who were found to have been absent from the ball the night before, or the fair lady who got peeved at having her beauty sleep disturbed by the serenaders!

This year proved no exception. At the close of the ball, homes were opened to all out-of-town guests, hot breakfasts and gay parties wound up the ball in proper style. As twilight faded into day, we serenading to the tune of the "Big Bad Wolf," and was enjoyed as much by the 1934 moderns as was "Lovely Lady Awake" and "Old Dan Tucker" or "Poor Old Jeff" that aroused the sleeping belles of the early 'seventies.

Many old families of the Cariboo Road were represented at the ball. These descendants have just pride in it and have built a handsome hall, with a spring floor, a fine dining room and every convenience for continuing this event. They never worried very much about halls in the old days, one guest stated. The second ball was held in a warehouse built by Mr. Bell next door to the hotel. Four log walls, a good shake roof and a dry goods box for the musicians would suffice.

As soon as the courthouse was built, for some years they held the dance there. Every year refusal to the courthouse was made to the committee by the powers that ...Officialdom contended that with the walls of a building that one day might echo the sentence of death by hanging to one or more was no place for people to dance and make merry. The decision was always over-ruled, however, and for a long time the scales of justice, the benches and desks and documents were carefully removed for safe-keeping, and where the mills of justice usually turned, the gayest of frivolity was engaged in, matches were made, love affairs budded and truce called to family feuds.

Though there Plenty of the cup that cheers at Clinton on Gala nights, it is the proud boast of the old-timers that the ballroom has never been disgraced by an ungentlemanly act, and the youngsters of 1934 carry on this tradition. After midnight, for six full hours, old-time dances were enjoyed. The youngsters can do such old ones as the heel and toe polka. It is fast and graceful and lots of fun, but rather strenuous for those over the forty mark. There was the Danish Polka or the Flying Dutchman, which was a great favorite in the 'eighties. There was danced at the sixty-sixth annual with skill the Mazurka and the Valse Sovianna, the seven-up, Scottish and military schottisches, which call for speed and rhythm. The floor was filled with couples for the minuet, and the 1934 vintage has nothing to apologize for. Other old-time dances were executed were the Saratoga lancers, Sir Roger, Carmancetta, rush polka and waltz quadrille.

Until the war, Clinton balls were held for two nights only. Now one night is crowded to capacity. Neighboring districts feel a kindred interest and a bounden duty to keep up the spirits of the dances. Judge Calder and Mrs. Calder of Ashcroft attended with a party. Regrets in letters and in telegrams came from as far south as the Okanogan and north as Barkerville and Kamloops to Vancouver were received by the committee. The sixty-sixth annual ball at Clinton has passed into history. It was a grand affair in every respect, with a background that few such functions in British Columbia can boast of.

Feb.6, 1932

Clinton Annual Ball Forges Another Link

The 22nd and 23rd of January may be recorded as the 64th anniversary of the Clinton ball. This enjoyable mid-winter reunion having been duly celebrated and another link forged in the long chain of these occurrence, reaching back to the days prior to the decision of the province of British Columbia to enter into confederation with our dominion.

The date of the first Clinton ball, January 1868, is vouched for by that fountain of knowledge relating to the history of British Columbia's hinterland, James Buie Leighton, of Savona, who nearly sixty years ago was present at one of these events and was a constant patron for many succeeding years, being married at Clinton to Janie Uren in 1882, whom he met at the Clinton ball some years prior to his marriage.

At the very urgent invitation of Clinton, Mr. Leighton was this year again a participant in the festivities, and although now over eighty years of age, he was still fully capable of leading the "Grand March", and also presenting very interesting data relative to the Clinton annual ball from its inception. His personal experience combined with the accuracy of his memory were a revelation to those who were privileged to hear this fine old gentleman.

This year's celebration was a direct denial for prevailing depression, especially on the second night, when, to enumerate the Ashcroft visitors would practically represent a copy of the dictionary. Travel from the north was impeded by drifting snow, many cars being forced to return to the 150 Mile House and Williams Lake without reaching their destination. It can however be noted that socially.

May 30 1958

90th ANNUAL EVENT

Clinton Pulls Out Stops With Ball, Rodeo, Parade

CLINTON (CP)-All-night celebrations in this Cariboo district community Thursday night opened the 90th annual observance of the oldest event of its kind in British Columbia-the Clinton ball.

Centennial celebrations and pioneer activities are featured in the ball, which ran from 10 p.m. Thursday to 3 a.m. and continues tonight from 10 o'clock till 6 a.m. Saturday. In addition to the after dark festivities, there were companion events during the day Thursday.

Timbers from the historic Clinton Hotel, destroyed by fire less than two weeks ago after being in operation since 1861, were used to make the sceptre presented to Patsy Shortbread, junior high school student elected rodeo queen Thursday.

Celebrations included the rodeo, with four winners in last years bareback and saddle bronc competitions last year competing for the championships.

Thursdays winners were: bareback Fred Pippelo and Gary Hook of Kamloops; saddle bronc, Bob Gottfriedson of Kamloops and Bud Stewart of Westwold; calf roping Bale Arave of 70 Mile House.

Seven contestants tried to ride the wild bull "Zero" but none were successful.

Today's program will consist of the annual May Day Parade and crowning of May Queen 13-year-old Norma Preston, daughter of a pioneer family.

In the afternoon styles of the last 100 years will be shown in a fashion show for the women, and a turkey shoot is being held for the men.

Sunday the centennial celebration will end with an old-time basket picnic at the old Pollard Ranch, first ranch in the Clinton district.

Clinton Ball Friday Night

The 91st annual ball, known as the oldest annual community celebration in B.C. will be held this Friday, May 15th. The theme this year will be Cariboo fishing and hunting. Scenes depicting animals in their natural haunts will decorate the walls of the hall.

The first ball was held in the lobby of the Clinton Hotel (since destroyed by fire recently), in 1868, a full dress, invitation affair.

In the old days the Clinton ball and it's associate functions sometimes lasted a week; and drew people from a far away as San Francisco. They came also from Barkerville and from other Cariboo points. Program this year will include a big parade coronation for the May Queen, turkey shoot and a grand ball during the evening as well as other events during the day.

For 64 years the Ashcroft journal through it's columns have the before and after the "ball" and each and every year proves to be bigger and better than the previous one. Don't miss it!

A WILD RIDE ON A CARIBOO STAGE IN SEPTEMBER 1902

By L. Lebourdais

On a September morning before sunup twenty-two years ago, one of Billy Bishop's road gang dropped off a his foaming horse at 150-Mile House, on the Cariboo-Yukon Road, and burst into the telegraph office. "Get Doc Sanson quick! Stagecoach wrecked on Bridge Creek Hill; one man dying and two badly hurt," he panted and staggered out to rub down the quivering animal that had carried him in record time from the scene of the accident.

"J J J—HU" "J J J—HU" flashed the operator without further query.

The office at Clinton was not yet open for business. The operator, still sound asleep, stirred in his blankets at the signal and on the repeat of his own call rolled out and dashed to his instrument to respond.

"Where is Doc Sanson?" Came the message.

"Out of town. Who wants him?" queried back the sleepy operator.

"Stage had a runaway down Bridge Creek Hill. One man dying, two hurt. Get him." HU clicked back.

The operator thoroughly wakened now, knew that the sign on Doc Sanson's door read "Gone to the hospital for a few days" meant that the duck season was on and that it would be difficult to reach the "doc." But men in that country in those days were used to difficulties and he wired back and the doctor would get the message all right.

Meanwhile the Cariboo stage was lying bottom side up at the foot of a steep cutbank on Bridge Creek Hill with its two passengers trapped underneath, one of them to die within the hour. He was Walter Abbot, a jerkline teamster, who was on his way to 105-Mile House to drive for Ben McNeil.

At the top of Bridge Creek Hill that morning he had asked the only other passenger, a stranger, to change places with him. Abbot wanted to sit on the outside edge of the box seat, so he could expectorate in comfort, as he had just taken a chew of tobacco. They changed, the stranger sitting next to Fred Peters, the driver. Not often does a chew of tobacco save a man's life, but unquestionably it saved the stranger's that day.

From Mrs. Sanson the Clinton telegraph operator learned that the doctor, with his brother-in-law, Dune Campbell of Victoria, and Jack Walker had gone to Bob Jamison's "Illahee." If the shooting was not good there they had planned to go to 70-Mile House and from there travel the old Canoe Creek trail to the Beaver Dam country, where the prairie chicken were reported plentiful. That meant three messengers, but

messengers with good horses were scarce and only two could be found—an Indian who would ride to Jamison’s and if he failed to find the doctor there, on to 70-Mile House, a distance of about thirty miles. The other messenger—a boy—was to go to Janes’ Desolation Ranch, near Big Bar Lake, and from there to Beaver Dam range.

WILD RIDE FOR THE DOCTOR

“Ride like hell!” shouted Billy Holtom, the Clinton B. X. hostler and agent, as they rode by the express companies office. “I’ll take the doctor’s instrument case to 59-Mile House and if the doctor ain’t at Beaver Dam, boy, you ride right through to the “59” by Canoe Creek Road and let me know so I can right to the “70.”

The messengers rode to Pollard’s Pitch, where their roads separated and the boy took the three-mile climb up the main highway. He slowed his pony for the long grade to conserve his strength for the fourteen-mile run from the summit to the hunting grounds. As he was about to leave the highway to Janes’ road he heard a rattle of wheels close behind him and swung his saddle to see Holtom, without a hat, his long hair disheveled, his face streaked with perspiration and dust, his horses like that of the messenger, wringing wet, driving at a wild gallop.

“Gosh Almighty!” exclaimed the driver. “Is this as fur as ye’ve got? A fine one you are to send for a doctor. One man’s dead already. They’ll all be dead afore you get anywhere. Shove that old crow-bait along. Don’t be afeared to warm him up. We’ll pay for it if it kills him. I left half an hour behind you.” As the hostler was leaving the stable with the doctor’s kit, either to “grandstand” or because he was excited, he had struck each of his horses with the whip. Not many, if any, “B. X.” horses would stand for that without retaliating. They had sprang forward and, feeling a light buggy behind them instead of the heavy thorough-brace wagon, started to run. In the next three-miles Holtom had lost everything cut of the rig except the doctor’s bag. That remained by pure accident, because the hostler happened to have the satchel between his knees when the team started, and the harder they ran the harder he squeezed. The team managed to stay on the road, but it was not until they ran for three-miles on the level, then halfway up Clinton Hill, and were out of wind, that the exhausted hostler was able to pull them up. The boy rode on to Janes’ place, where he found that the doctor’s party was at Dan Rowe’s place, three-miles further along a pre-emptor’s road.

Smoke was coming from the stovepipe of the cabin when the boy came in sight of the place and the pleasant odor of frying bacon and grouse was wafted to him as Dan Rowe threw open the door. He had heard the rapid hoof beats of the galloping horse and, suspecting it was a call for the doctor, was already blowing a long blast on a cow’s horn that hung on a nail by the cabin door.

The three hunters came into-sight a few minutes afterwards, and the doctor, seeing a rider with a dripping, panting horse, ran forward quickly.

“I knew it, I knew it,” he said as he read the telegram. “I can stick around for a month at a time and nobody will even get a stomach-ache, but no sooner do I leave town then some son-of-a-gun will break a leg.”

No time was lost, however, and the doctor ate hastily, while others piled things in the light wagon and hooked up “Dick and Tom.”

Dick and Tom were the doctor’s driving horses, a team imported from Ontario. With them he always made the trip to Ashcroft, thirty-three miles from Clinton, in three hours; to Lilloet, forty-seven miles, in five hours and back in the same time. Those sending for him allowed no extra time for hitching up. They timed his arrival at the sick bed just an hour for each ten miles from the time he received the message to come, and he rarely disappointed them.

HORSES KEPT IN FINE CONDITION

In the fifty years that the B.C. express Company operated on the Cariboo road, their horses, sometimes half-broken colts, were always well fed and cared for. Always full of spirits, it took sometimes two or three men to “hook” them up, and it is little wonder that occasionally these wild creatures got the upper hand of the drivers. Rather it is a wonder that there were not more smash-ups and fatalities.

No breeching was used on the wheelers of the stage teams in the summer time, and the lever brake was the only protection the driver had. If anything went wrong with that he was at the mercy of the horses.

On this September morning, however, when Doc Sanson was sent for in such a hurry, fate, in the form of the Bridge Creek Hill tragedy, drove home to express company’s head office that breeching ought to be used on all wheel teams in future, and an order went through to that effect,

Fred Peters had the drive that morning from 83-Mile House to the “134,” and the stage had left the stopping place (the “83”) that Saturday morning on time-4 o’clock.

The inside of the stage and front back “boots” were filled with “haddocks” and prunes, other express and mail, perhaps three thousand pounds in all.

For fifteen miles all went well, or until they were halfway down Bridge Creek Hill. On the steepest part, Rhondo, the off-wheeler, stumbled and fell, and in picking himself up lunged ahead and jumped into the lead-bars. Nig and Nash, the leaders, were hard to hold at any time and, frightened by the plunging behind them, leaped forward and started to run. Rhondo, the big roan, was clear of the lead-bars by this time, and in less time it takes to tell the outfit was tearing down the hill at a fearful rate. Peters “sawed” and hauled on the lines, straining on the brake at the same time. With two wheels in the shallow ditch at one side, he made the two bad turns in the road just below where they started to run, and on the next straight stretch tried with all his skill to throw a wheeler so that the weight of its dragging body would slow them down. But, even old Rhondo was sure-footed now and the pace increased rather than slackened, while the coach rocked and swayed from side to side. Near the foot of the hill there was an extra sharp turn and Peters was dreading it. He was certain they would never make the curve at the speed they were traveling, even if by skillful driving he could keep them on the road to that point,

SET WATCHES BY STAGE TIME

A short distance above this last turn, Bill Bishop’s road gang was camped. So near to schedule did the stages run in those old “B. X.” days that the people along the route could almost set their watches by them as they passed by. “Peters is early this morning,” one of the men remarked as he glanced at the cook-tent clock. They were just beginning breakfast and usually the stage passed the camp as they were finishing. They could always hear the coach some little time before it got opposite them.

“Gee, Peters is astaging ‘em this morning,” said another man as he looked out the tent door and saw the stage come around the corner on two wheels. “They’re running away,” he called as he ran to the road. The rest followed, and as the mail coach flashed by the clearing they could see that every horse was stretched out to the limit and was running for all he was worth. The coach was swaying sickeningly and the two passengers, their faces blanched with fear, were clinging to the iron railing along the seat. They saw Peter toss his whip over his shoulder – a sure sign the driver was in trouble. He had hung on to it this far, but now apparently had lost all hope. They saw the look of pain upon his face as the leaders neared the fatal curve, and those nearest to him heard him cry out, “Say good-bye to the boys.”

At the same time Peters reached down with a mighty heave on the reins swung the horses into the cliff. The coach struck with a tremendous impact, catapulting the drivers thirty feet into the air, and turning over and over, finally coming to rest bottom side up with the two passengers pinned underneath. The four horses plunged on around the corner and there the animals, breaking loose from the rigging ran bruised and bleeding, covered with foam, to their stable at 100-Mile House.

When they lifted the coach from Abbot and the stranger they found them both unconscious. Peters, lying in a crumpled heap at the side of the road, was also unconscious, but regained his senses in a few minutes and finding himself comparatively unhurt at once announced his intentions of continuing his drive to the "134."

Abbot recovered consciousness for a few moments, but died within the hour. The stranger came to quickly to find that his most serious injury was a crushed ankle.

Dune McDougal, a member of the road gang, lost no time in running to Bridge Creek and obtaining a good saddle horse there dashed on to bear the message to the doctor that was to be so many times relayed.

With a fresh team and a borrowed freight wagon Peters gathered up the mail, and leaving the prunes, which were scattered in all directions, for the roadmen to pick up, left the camp soon after Abbot had passed away and reached the "34" not much more than an hour late.

On his next down trip, much to his surprise and amusement, Peters found, on passing the road camp, that most of the men were laid sick from the result of an overdose of "Italian" prunes.

Commenting on the runaway and accident later, Peters said that they would defy anyone to have acted differently under the same circumstances, and as for holding the four runaway horses who, after they had started to run, were doing their utmost to keep out of the way of the onrushing heavily loaded coach, it was as futile as trying to stop a freight train by hanging on to the tail-end of the caboose.

Fred Peters still drives a coach-and-six on the Cariboo road, but it is a "silent six" of "Lake Louise blue" and not the old red and gold of the B.C. express with its "snappy six" young and vigorous "hay-burners."

Retyped from the
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