



# **Cameron Bay, Great Bear Lake**

## **The Story of the Northwest Territories' First Boom Town**

By Ryan Silke

May 2022

**Cameron Bay, Great Bear Lake:  
The Story of the Northwest Territories' First Boom Town**

by Ryan Silke

© Asbestos We Could Productions, May 2022

Printed by Kopykat North, Yellowknife Northwest Territories

ISBN 978-0-9878535-1-6

*The sight of empty cabins and trails already growing weeds and willows, the odd forgotten dogs, quickly losing contact with human beings and growing wild, an occasional bear investigating an old scrap heap; the waves on the bay piling fresh clean sand over the junk and scrap left on the beach - the whole scene has a grey air of desolation, and loneliness, and grandeur. It seems to say: I was here first. You came and defiled my beaches, cut and burned my forests, and disturbed my peace with your noisy crowds. Some I have made rich; some I have frozen to death; others drowned and the rest gone. Soon my beaches will be clean; the cabins rotted away and buried in layers of leaves from the new trees I am already growing. When you are all gone and forgotten I'll still be here, still hiding within myself the richest treasures.*

*That's what the mountains and the lakes, the rivers and the lapping waves say to you when you sit alone by the beach in the long, long days of the Arctic summer. That's what they say when you remember the excitement of boom days in their glory. That's what they say when you think of broken dreams and shattered hopes and you notice wild animals coming back to see if the last of us has gone. And you realize the complete reversion of a buzzing centre of human activity to the elemental. Sometimes it says you have been here too long. Somehow it makes you want to get away.*

- Tony Onraet \*

---

\* Onraet, Tony "Sixty Below" London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1944. p. 180



## ~ Forward ~

In the summer of 2005, I had an incredible opportunity to visit Great Bear Lake. I spent a week lodging in the middle of the historic Port Radium/Echo Bay mining district, the site of the first mineral rush to the Northwest Territories in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was a time when economic minerals had barely been proven in the territory although prospectors had been diligently searching for years. Oil and gas had been tapped on the Mackenzie River, lead and zinc staked at Pine Point, and rumours of gold and copper drifted into the old fur trading posts via the moccasin telegraph. When it was confirmed that Gilbert Labine found radium and silver at Great Bear Lake in 1930, the north was changed forever. The pursuit of minerals would define the trajectory of the northern economy thereafter.

The Great Bear Lake mining camp was like many others that came before or those that followed. Attracted by the sudden importance of the field, settlers arrived in droves. There were prospectors, greenhorn and veteran; traders and trappers, government agents and police officers, preachers and doctors, natives and newcomers, men and women. They were a flock of individualists from all around the world. They came to look for gold, silver, or new minerals beyond their understanding. Radium bearing pitchblende was the lure of Great Bear Lake, a radioactive element tailored for 20<sup>th</sup> century scientific enlightenment. Radium was not the classic “pot of gold” every prospector dreamed of, but it was ounce for ounce of greater value than anything else known to exist - all the incentive anyone needed.

Several mines were staked, explored and developed. The “Eldorado Mine” was the most commercially successful, hosting both rich radium, silver, copper, and of course the uranium minerals that led the mine to later infamy. Smaller grade orebodies at the White Eagle, Contact Lake, Bonanza, and El-Bonanza, and others did not prove economic, but in the 1930s these projects were strong contenders for the next big thing. The activity and interest emanating from regional exploration was significant enough for settlers to start a town on Great Bear Lake, a place where the newcomers could set up restaurants, general stores, trading posts, and hotels. Government held faith that the camp would be of permanence, and inaugurated police and communication services. By 1933, a surveyed settlement, “Cameron Bay”, could be pointed to on many Canadian maps.

When I visited Cameron Bay in 2005, there was still evidence that this place and the surrounding hills had once been a burgeoning mining outpost. The main Eldorado Mine had been razed years ago but some carefully curated monuments stood as wayfinding sentinels. Smaller mines were relegated to abandoned works of rotted log cabins, flooded pits, and teetering headframes. The boom town of Cameron Bay went bust within five years of its creation as the mines were depleted or prospectors moved onto more exciting fields, as they are wont to do. As I trudged through the overgrown ruins of Cameron Bay, or the nearby mines, I thought about the generations that society eventually forgets. In the 1930s Great Bear Lake was a household name, a symbol of economic salvation for many downtrodden farmers, clerks, bankers, traders, and prospectors, and its radium minerals a source of medical healing. Oh, how the paradigms shift. Its legacy is now environmental

contamination and, ironically, the ill health of people who worked there or have tried to use the land since.

As a born and raised Yellowknifer, it was interesting to learn that many of our own pioneers got an auspicious start at Great Bear Lake. Without Cameron Bay, there very well may not have been a Yellowknife as we know it. Johnny Baker, Major Burwash, Vic Ingraham, Tom Payne, Pete Racine, Darcy Arden, Ed Demelt, Fred Peet, Wylie Willie, Frank Moyle, Pete Baker, Andy Reid, Norman and Dorothy Baile, and dozens more...characters that got a start at Great Bear Lake and moved to Yellowknife Bay as rumours about gold there spread. The gold was real and long-lasting, and so a new city of permanence came to be.

Cameron Bay was left to languish and join the ranks of Canadian ghost towns. The story of this place is important to preserve in some way, even if only on paper. What follows is my brief history of the Great Bear Lake mining rush and the boom town that came to be.

Ryan Silke  
Yellowknife, NWT  
May 2022

[ryansilke@gmail.com](mailto:ryansilke@gmail.com)



**Map of the Echo Bay region, Great Bear Lake**





# **Cameron Bay, Great Bear Lake: The Story of the Northwest Territories' First Boom Town**

By Ryan Silke

## **~ Introduction ~**

Gilbert Labine's important discovery of economic radium and silver metals in 1930 on the rocky shores of Great Bear Lake sparked a mining rush. The mine came to be known as Eldorado. It was located on Labine Point, a small jutting bay on the McTavish (or east) arm of Great Bear, located to the north of the much larger fjord known as Echo Bay. Other mines developed too – El-Bonanza, Contact Lake, White Eagle – all located within a 30 kilometer radius of the original Labine discovery. They proved to be marginal deposits of little commercial value. The Eldorado Mine however would only grow in importance. Uranium minerals in the deposit were of strategic importance during and after World War Two, and Eldorado for a time was North America's only producer of uranium, contributing to the research and development of the first nuclear weapons.

This story follows the early stages of the Great Bear camp's exploration and settlement in the 1930s. In the two years following the discovery of Eldorado in 1930, the rush was on to find silver and radium in the north. The typical patterns of colonization and settlement in Canada's frontier regions meant that prospectors would set up base camps and commerce would follow. And so, in 1932 on one of the few amenable sandy beaches of the imposing Echo Bay, a town was born. It was sometimes called 'Radium City' and officially designated 'Port Radium' by the post office in 1937. The Hudson's Bay Company called its fur trading post there 'Fort Dease' – the name never stuck. It is most fondly remembered as Cameron Bay.

## **~ Great Bear Lake ~**

Great Bear Lake is the largest lake entirely within the political borders of Canada, and the 8<sup>th</sup> largest fresh-water lake in the world by surface area. It is over 31,000 square kilometers in area with a maximum depth of 1,463 feet. At a latitude of between 65 and 67 degrees north, Great Bear has long dark winters and long bright summers as is typical of the sub-arctic seasons. Ice covers the lake nine months of the year, sometimes not melting until early July.

The name originates from the Dene word *Sahtuotine*, a self-identifier sometimes translated as "grizzly bear water people" or more simply "bear lake people". The pre-history of Great Bear Lake has been investigated by archaeologists with equivocal results. At a site on the Great Bear River called "Franklin Tanks", researchers in the 1950s identified human occupation loosely dated at 6,500 to 7,500 years before present, a few thousand years after the retreat of the continental glaciers. Unfortunately, the site had been disturbed by industrial activity thus leading to many questions about the extent of

the occupation. Elsewhere around the lake, a wide variety of human-occupied sites hint at a complex migratory sequence through time from multiple directions. <sup>1</sup>

Dene oral stories convey ancient cultural connections to the land and animals throughout the Sahtu region. “Back then caribou was important, but fish was the main source of food. As families we would often travel together around the lake to good hunting and fishing spots. Children learned through word of mouth from their elders and parents; they learned about science, animals, and the Dene ways.” <sup>2</sup> Once, before the arrival of Europeans, the Dene were quasi-nomadic and lived in camps all round the big lake, subsisting on migratory caribou, fish, and small fur-bearing animals. The trade economy and invasive white settler contact gradually changed lifeway patterns but the connections to and importance of the land and its resources has never been forgotten by the Dene. <sup>3</sup>

We may never know the identity of the first white men to see Great Bear Lake but they were likely connected to the fur trade that finally reached this part of the north in the late 1700s. Early traders marked “Bear Lake” on their maps and within trading post journals. W.F. Wentzel in the 1820s described the lake’s importance: “It abounds in fish, and its borders are frequented at all seasons of the year by herds of reindeer, to which may be added the muskox on the east side. Its shores are rocky and for the most part barren, and unattractive, it nevertheless produces martins, muskrats, white and red foxes, a few beaver, wolverines, some otters and bears.” <sup>4</sup> The bounty of fur-bearing animals had attracted fur traders to Great Bear Lake as early as 1799, when the French established a post on the lake’s west end. British explorer John Franklin re-established a post on his way to the Arctic Ocean in 1826, at what is now the Dene community of Deline (or Fort Franklin).

Great Bear Lake came under the political realm of the “Northwest Territories” with the transferring of lands from the Hudson’s Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada in 1870. The NWT continued under the purview of HBC traders and the Catholic church who were the primary institutions controlling the land and its inhabitants. Increased activities by free traders together with mineral discoveries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century convinced the Dominion of Canada to take on more direct roles in governance and land authority. Treaties were signed with northern Dene bands in 1899/1900 (Treaty 8) and 1921 (Treaty 11, which encompassed the Great Bear Lake area). There were differing views on the intent of these treaties – Canada saw them as an extinguishment of Indigenous ownership of territorial lands, while Dene bands have always contended the treaties were pacts of friendship. Indigenous perspectives were not acknowledged until the 1970s; in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, settler activities, including mineral exploration and development, proceeded under the guise of legal authority.

Canada encouraged the exploration of whatever resources might be found in the Northwest Territories, and government organized programs to support prospectors and companies in the pursuit of minerals. Dr. James Mackintosh Bell surveyed the east arm of Great Bear Lake in 1900. Dr. Bell’s geological observations collected dust on library shelves for years, but interest in the geology of the far north did not die. Legendary

copper deposits along the arctic coast, first identified by Samuel Hearne in the 1770s, were still a target, and Great Bear Lake offered an easy route towards the Coppermine River. George Douglas and Dr. A. Sandberg made detailed geological and geographical notes in 1912. In 1922, trapper Charles Sloan observed copper-stained boulders on Great Bear's eastern arm. <sup>5</sup>

Most of the Northwest Territories mineral deposits were considered too isolated from the rest of Canada to be profitable. The application of the airplane by mine hunters changed the game, and in the late 1920s aerial prospecting brought in more explorers with speed and efficiency. Dominion Explorers and Northern Aerial Mineral Exploration visited the Coppermine River in 1929 and 1930, camping on the shores of Great Bear Lake and staking over 200 claims in the region. The stock market crash of September 1929 and resulting economic depression put a damper on much of this activity and no copper mines were ultimately proven. Yet the "Great Depression" would be no match to stop the enthusiasm of one of Canada's greatest mineral rushes in the years to come.

### ~ Gilbert Labine's Discovery ~

There was another treasure in the rocks at Great Bear Lake that few could have fathomed. Gilbert Labine proved this when he chipped off a high-grade chunk of ore from a cliff-face with his pickaxe. It turned out to be a significant mineral strike and developments at Great Bear would finally, after years of unsuccessful prospecting, reveal the Northwest Territories' mineral potential.

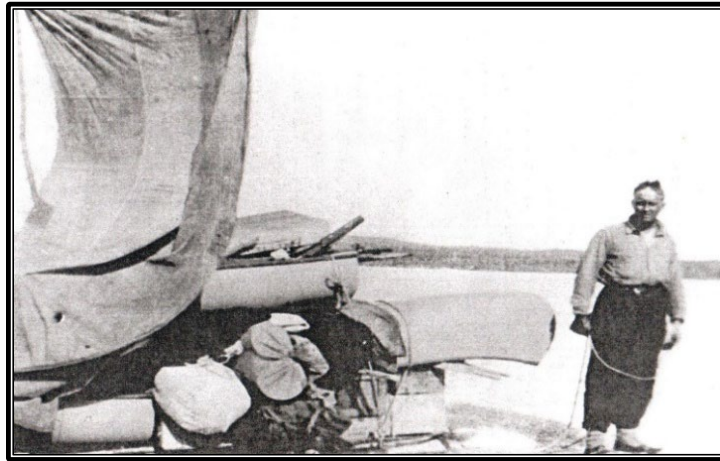
Gilbert Labine was born in 1890 and spent his early teenage years in the booming Cobalt, Ontario silver camp, where together with his older brother Charlie they worked in silver mines. Gilbert was only sixteen when he first struck it rich. The two made a good pair. Charlie, the charming businessman, had a knack as a promoter. Gilbert, rather, was interested in the 'hands-on' aspects of, prospecting and geology, and enrolled into the Haileybury School of Mines to further his knowledge of the field. <sup>6</sup>

In 1926, the Labine's incorporated Eldorado Gold Mines Limited to develop a gold property in Manitoba. Although the mine was a dud, it gave them a foothold in the competitive mining industry. Indeed, the name 'Eldorado' was a romantic title for a mining company: the 'City of Gold' harkened back to days of Spanish conquest in the new world. Eldorado needed a new conquest.



**Gilbert Labine**  
**(Canadian Mining Journal,**  
**November 1948)**

The year 1929 was huge for mineral exploration, especially in the high arctic where aerial prospecting captured the attention of mine makers. Gilbert Labine heard about Great Bear Lake and joined the aerial rush in the fall of 1929. He was dropped off by Leigh Brintnell of Western Canada Airways at Hunter Bay, on the northern extreme of the Lake's eastern or McTavish Arm. Things didn't pan out so well for Labine. Disoriented by unfamiliar territory and thrown off compass bearings by magnetized bedrock, he frequently was turned around and lost. The mosquitoes were worse than anything he had ever experienced. He hired Indigenous Dene guides to navigate but they were unwilling to travel too far from the shores out of fear of the rival Inuit hunters who contested the territory stretching north to the Arctic Ocean.



**Gilbert Labine with his sled, May 1930.  
(from "The Port Radium Story" by Robert Jenkins)**

In September 1929, a Western Canada Airways plane piloted by Punch Dickins arrived to pick up Gilbert Labine. Resigned to defeat, he sat back in the small plane and gazed out its small windows at the country below as the plane flew southbound. The stark topography of rugged hills and rocky fjords of the McTavish Arm caught his eye. Roots of ancient mountains, faulted in strong linear contacts between granite intrusions and beds of cooked sediments, stretched for miles inland. The scenery from above was impressive. And then something unique caught his eye. It was not the immensity of the formations but the colours of the rocks, or more importantly, the colours of the gossan staining. Labine's keen sense of geology kicked in as he observed rock outcrops with red smudge marks, evidence, he knew, of cobalt bloom, and where there is cobalt, there might be silver, or even better. Gilbert Labine vowed to return one day.

The winter of 1929-1930 was spent digging through government archives in search of information about the geology of the eastern shore of Great Bear Lake. Labine wanted to understand what he had seen. Was it a cobalt bloom? He found Dr. James Mackintosh Bell's old Geological Survey report from 1900 which seemed to confirm the prospector's theory: "In the greenstones east of McTavish Bay, occur numerous interrupted stringers of calc-spar containing chalcopyrite, and the steep rocky shores, which here present themselves to the lake, are often stained with cobalt bloom and copper green." <sup>7</sup>

With this encouragement in hand, Gilbert Labine urged brother Charlie to partake in a second visit to Great Bear Lake. Gilbert flew directly to the lake with partner Charles St. Paul. Charlie would head north by canoe with Leo Seaberg and Shirley Cragg with supplies and equipment and meet up with Gilbert in the summer.<sup>8</sup> Labine and St. Paul arrived at Great Bear Lake in April 1930. The plan was to trek along the solid lake ice to observe the geology along the McTavish Arm, a distance of over 100 kilometers. Their entire outfit of 1,600 pounds or more, including canoe, stove, food provisions, and other supplies, was loaded onto a crude sled, which the two men dragged across the ice.

Pictures of the load add to the impression of a near impossible task. An improvised wind sail and boots with hacksaw blades tied to their soles helped to push the expedition onward so that six-weeks later, the men had made it halfway up the eastern shore of the lake, but not without pain and suffering. There were days when snowstorms trapped the men in the tiny tents. St. Paul, disabled by the effects of snow blindness, was unable to carry on with prospecting, and spent a week or more recovering in camp. Labine explored alone, but work was greatly hampered by his double role as prospector and caregiver for his injured partner.<sup>9</sup>

By May 16, 1930 the snow was starting to melt off the cliffs of the east shore, revealing the geological formations underneath. Eventually Labine came upon it: a broad strip crossing the rocks on its way up a high hill from the lakeshore, a dull and dirty lead colour that only to a prospector hinted at rich silver mineralization. It began at a 90 foot rock wall, stained with cobalt bloom and copper green, and the vein followed a north-easterly path along the edge of this ridge further up the rocky topography and over the horizon. Southwest, it continued under the waters of Great Bear Lake, outcropping again on a large island about 150 feet off shore. Labine was familiar enough with the metallurgy of pitchblende ores to discern that it was a showing of significance. Two claims, the 'Cobalt' and 'Cobalt 1', were staked on May 18 and 19, 1930.<sup>10</sup>

### ~ Proving an Eldorado ~

"I suddenly realized that I was in elephant country" Gilbert Labine would later say as he looked back on his fantastic find in 1930.<sup>11</sup> The Labine brothers and their prospecting partners spent the better part of the summer at their mineral claims on Great Bear Lake, hammering away at the vein and collecting samples for assay. Closer investigation revealed the presence of important minerals: cobalt, silver, nickel, copper, and lead. The copper was so concentrated that Labine carved his initials into the vein with his prospector's pick. Pitchblende was the most exciting part of the discovery. Labine recalled: "I walked over to this place and investigated it carefully and found all the associated ores of cobalt, including silver. Following along, I found a tiny piece of ore, probably the size of a large plum, and it was pitchblende."<sup>12</sup>

Labine was also one of the few prospectors in Canada educated in the metallurgy of pitchblende deposits. Cobalt bloom, he knew, was associated with pitchblende ores under unique geological conditions. Since the Haileybury days, when he first learned about the ore, he had tried, unsuccessfully, to locate a pitchblende deposit in Canada. Such a

discovery would be of momentous importance for the Canadian mineral industry and for the world as a whole.

Pitchblende was a useless type of ore until 1898 when Pierre and Marie Curie extracted radium from a small sample acquired in Bohemia. Radium, highly radioactive, was discovered to have a cancer-curing effect. As the element disintegrates it produces energy under great stress, throwing out fragments at incredible speeds. This disintegration is manifested as radiation. Its medical applications in the field of x-ray technology for cancer treatment were quickly understood. As a result, radium was worth more than most elements, including gold. Its high price was around \$70,000 per gram (in 1932), a cost reflective of its rarity in the world at the time. In 1930, the yearly world production of radium was about 35 grams. The supply of pitchblende was monopolized by the Belgian-Congo government, where the highest-grade radium deposits known were being mined. But to produce a gram of radium required tons of pitchblende ore, many chemicals, and a complicated science. The demand for grade and quantity bankrupted most business ventures that tried to deal with radium.



**Prospectors at Great Bear Lake (Fred Peet photo)**

It was Labine's mission to prove that an economic radium deposit existed in the far north. Economics was key. Even though the market price for the element was incredibly high, nobody had proven that profitable mining could be accomplished in the high arctic. Early assay tests favourably proved the metallurgy of the pitchblende ore. More work was required before the news could be officially released. They also needed considerable financing to embark on what undoubtedly would be an expensive development campaign. By the end of 1930, the Labines' personally raised over \$300,000 from Canadian and American investors, and their company Eldorado Gold Mines Limited was once again selling shares to the public.

Meanwhile, rumors about Great Bear Lake trickled down into the ears of a public still suffering the fallout of the stock market crash of 1929. Although the market was very volatile and metal prices had yet to fully recover, investment opportunities were not ignored. The development of new mineral fields was always welcome news. Radium ores in the distant arctic was particularly interesting. The first public announcement was

probably *The Toronto Star* newspaper, which on October 7, 1930 announced: "Toronto Pair Claim Radium Found in North". Details were sketchy:

Two Toronto men, the Labine brothers, believe they have made a valuable find of radium bearing ore on Echo Bay, on the southeastern shore of Great Bear Lake...Samples of the ore have been submitted to government and private assayers <sup>13</sup>

There was considerable skepticism. Analysts doubted if ores of any kind would be profitable to mine at such a distant location. No deposit had been outlined. There were no facilities in Canada for treating and recovering radium products. Nonetheless, the veil of mystery, intrigue, and simple novelty provided a lure to the speculative public. <sup>14</sup>

The responsibility to prove the value of the Great Bear Lake ores was in the hands of the Canadian government and its Department of Mines, established to research, investigate, and publicize mineral resources. Hugh Spence was the mineralogist assigned to the file as he had experience with pitchblende ore. His report confirmed the high-value nature of the pitchblende and silver ores at Great Bear Lake and their amenability to normal mining and concentration practices. <sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, Eldorado and the government collaborated on a method to recover a radium product from scratch. Eldorado hired Marcel Pochon, a very qualified French chemical engineer who had been trained in radium chemistry by Pierre Curie. From Pochon's small radium refinery in England an effective method was devised for treating the pitchblende ores. <sup>16</sup>

Government officials were very receptive to the idea of a radium industry. It would promote mineral development in the far arctic and help rebuild the national economy. Radium was a highly lucrative business opportunity not to be taken for granted or ignored. The government looked at ways to promote exploration. Owing to the remoteness, lack of transportation, and prevailing markets conditions, all of which may have rendered investment on mining properties in the Great Bear Lake inadvisable, an Order in Council on June 24, 1931 suspended the provisions of the Quartz Mineral Regulations relating to representation work granting owners of mineral claims one year from July 1, 1932 to perform the exploration needed. This was later extended to October 1, 1933. The idea was to make the Great Bear Lake region attractive by giving companies more time to explore and report before the claims lapsed. <sup>17</sup>

The Department of the Interior mobilized to rebuild its resource administration which had almost disbanded with the end of the Mackenzie River oil boom in the 1920s. Fort Smith was the seat of administration for Ottawa's NWT and Yukon Bureau, the section of the Department responsible for land in the Northwest Territories and Yukon. Agent John A. McDougal was enforcer of the Dominion Lands Act and Quartz Mineral Regulations. In 1930 he was joined by Austin L. Cummings, chief mining inspector, hired to report on the new mineral activity around Great Bear Lake. Cummings was assisted by engineer and surveyor Mackay Meikle. The two field men reconnoitred select mineral deposits, visited posts to promote official mining laws to those who had an interest, and made notes on geography and geology as they went. They wanted to be

ready for what was certainly looking like a rush of settlers into the Northwest Territories, looking for minerals of any kind. <sup>18</sup>

### ~ A Rush for Radium ~

Minerals were discovered at Great Bear Lake in the midst of economic depression across North America. Men and women with no jobs were desperate for salvation, and mining magnates were looking for new investment opportunities. Stories of the riches that could be found in the Canadian Arctic were enticing for those with nothing to lose.

News of Eldorado's findings spread rapidly throughout Canada and the world. The resulting rush into the north took place after break-up 1932 and was highly anticipated based on the term coined by *The Northern Miner* newspaper, 'The Trail of '32'. But this was no Klondike Gold Rush. Most people didn't even know what pitchblende was. That hardly mattered considering just how valuable the supposed radium content was. Granted, other metals might be found, including silver, copper, and gold. It was a last desperate attempt for the many downtrodden men. Fredrick Watt was one of them. He later wrote:

The discovery was a beacon, a solitary ray of hope to an economy that was floundering in the darkness that followed the crash of 1929. Great Bear became a magnet to men battered by the ravages of the Depression. Its name was magic, and they began to follow Labine's trail north. <sup>19</sup>

Watt came north as partner in a prospecting syndicate, but most of his income came from writing articles for *The Edmonton Journal*. He was the first correspondent into the field. Watt wrote in an article published March 4, 1932: "There is no opposition and, as far as I know, there never has been any. Great Bear Lake may be the fourth largest body of water on the North American continent but this is probably the first press dispatch that was ever clicked off on its shores." Spending most of his time prospecting, Watt's articles were sporadic, but the stories provide great insight as to who was operating in the region and where the important finds were being made. His memoirs, published in 1982, are an account of human deluge and tragedy during one of the most fascinating staking rushes in Canada.

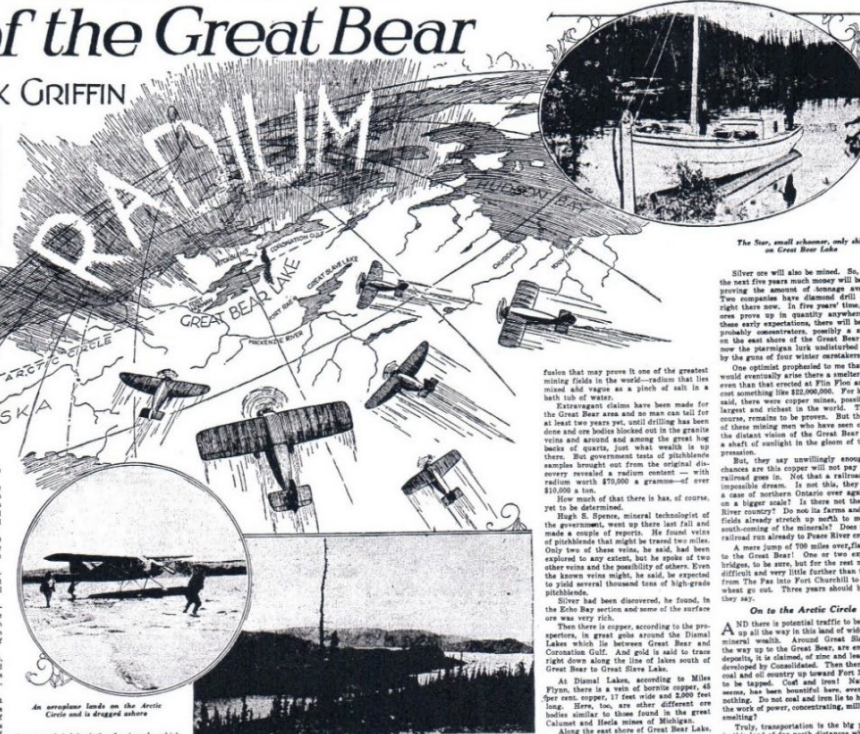
Men of every walk of life were lining up to make the journey to Great Bear Lake. The Great Depression meant that employment opportunities in the south were non-existent. Lack of experience in bush-life or prospecting were not deterrents, nor did it seem to matter what the odds were of succeeding. Young Edmonton boys Earl Harcourt and William Graham set off from Fort St. John with non-committal attitude: "We're just going to take a look, and stake if we find anything." <sup>20</sup> It is hard to imagine embarking on such a treacherous journey if your attitude isn't one of certainty and optimism, but such was the lack of career prospects that heading north for new pastures was the only option left.



# Call of the Great Bear

by FREDERICK GRIFFIN

FOR Canada, as far and for some time to come, there is never a Last North. There is there constantly a New North. In the present century Canadians have seen their Dominion which stretches from sea to sea, an ever-changing, ever-expanding from the timber lands of Muskoka and Haliburton to the gold, silver and nickel fields of Yukon, Cobalt, Kirkland Lake and Porcupine; on to the Red Lake and areas across to the copper deposits north of the Pas and then, with a quick flip, to Chibougamau, which still on Hudson Bay.



The Star, small skimmer, only ship on Great Bear Lake

Jacks wag and still farther north to the Arctic Circle. And Great Bear Lake, little sister of the Arctic Ocean, big island was that stretches between the 63rd and 65th parallels, becomes a mining suburb of Edmonton, Winnipeg and Toronto, especially Toronto, mining capital of all the north. Many men in Toronto are more conscious right now of Great Bear Lake than they are of Lake Ontario which this civilized and sane at its doorstep. Up there in the Barren Lands is the New-north with a new life—radium. It beckons with the stress and strain of mineral riches calling men to come to conquer. Lumber, wheat, power, gold, silver, copper, nickel and oil have swelled in turn the great north. Now radium, more than gold, more precious than platinum, joins in the ranks, and a new north is the rise of the Arctic shevets to the world. As the West once beckoned to Americans, calling them to adventure, pioneer, expand and build, so for Canadians, the North keeps calling in the conquest of the vague, vast wilderness. In the west of the United States conquest is complete; expansion is ended; a epoch is done. In the north of Canada an era of work is only beginning. For two generations at least the promise of it has shined. At the heart of the depression, with the world wallowing in the delirium of economic disaster, the word of radium in the far north of Canada comes like a shaft of sunlight through fog. Canadians for two years have been forgetting their north. Now the north shouts radium. And men are going after it. Men with the message of the men who opened up for Canada an empire of gold are going after this radium—and after the silver, copper, uranium and the sixteen other minerals that lie hidden in the barren, tortured, barren, ancient, long-ago rocks that form a geological treasury that lies for miles along the east end of Great Bear Lake reaching south toward the Great Slave and reaching north past the Daniel Lakes to the Coppermine River and Coronation Gulf.

So I went with Big Bill and talked with Silver Fox, E. C. St. Paul, Charles McLeod, Jack Byrne of Hallsbury and Charles Dixon. Dixon is the old-timer who has spent seven years, more or less, on and off Great Bear, and was the first man to make claims there that lasted because he could not then conceive the world, and because the territory was so inaccessible. Dixon, veteran prospector, was looking for gold and silver. He did not know about pitchblende, in which radium is regularly contained like an atom in a family, to be extracted by elaborate processes to make men rich because it is so rare. Dixon walked many times over the deposits of pitchblende and never knew it. But the story of mining is filled with thousands of chance like this. St. Paul is one who accompanied Gilbert

made the original discovery of pitchblende on Echo Bay and made the strike-up on Lash Point, and in which St. Paul discovered silver about six miles south, which made Great Bear Lake a sensation in mining and paved the way for the rush which will come as an air stream this year. Our Distant Treasure House BILLY FLETCHER showed me a tiny black metal pitchblende taken from the Great Bear deposits. It looked like a chunk of dull black asphalt chipped from a worn road. Yet it contained between 60 and 70 per cent. infinite diffusion in the form of some 3 parts silver to one of gold, silver, copper and all the rest of the minerals that may be there in a pro-

fusion that may prove it one of the greatest mining fields in the world—radium that lies mixed and vague as a pinch of salt in a bush tub of water. Extravagant claims have been made for the Great Bear area and no man can hold for at least two years yet, until drilling has been done and one body blundered out in the granite veins and around and among the great hog backs of quartz, just what wealth is up there. But government tests of pitchblende samples brought out from the original discovery revealed a radium content— with radium worth \$10,000 a gram—of over \$10,000 a ton. How much of that there is, in fact, of course, yet to be determined. Hugh E. Spence, mineral technologist of the government, went up there last fall and made a couple of reports. He found veins of pitchblende that he traced two miles. Only two of these veins, he said, had been explored in any extent, but he spoke of two other veins and the possibility of others. Even the known veins might, he said, be expected to yield several thousand tons of high-grade pitchblende. Silver had been discovered, he found, in Echo Bay section and some of the surface ore was very rich. Then there is copper, according to the prospectors, in great quantities around the Daniel Lakes which lie between Great Bear and Coronation Gulf. And gold is said to trace right down along the line of lakes south of Great Bear to Great Slave Lake. At Daniel Lakes, according to Miles Flynn, there is a vein of boracic copper, 40 per cent. copper, 17 feet wide and 2,000 feet long. Here, too, are other different ore bodies similar to those found in the great Calumet and Hunk mines of Michigan. Along the east shore of Great Bear Lake, including Echo Bay, Hunter Bay, three generations the only settlement has been a few isolated trading posts, many miles apart, and where, until the mining airplanes began to soar like quacking geese, all traffic was by boats which carried men and provisions, and the general past minerals flowed fluid into the porphyry strata of the old sedimentary rocks. Here, then, is this distant treasure house to be explored and exploited, possibly to make men's fortunes and to add to the wealth of Canada. At present the price of copper is around 7 cents a pound, lower than it has been over half the normal price in between 13 and 14 cents—that it is scarcely possible that this Arctic copper could compete with ore nearer their economic base. But if the price should ever come back, why then? From Daniel Lakes, it is said, ore may easily be transported to Coronation Gulf by tractor across the Barren Lands, a mere fifty miles, and shipped out around through the Arctic sea and off to the coast.

Silver ore will also be mined. So, within the next five years much money will be spent proving the amount of minerals available. Two companies have diamond drill outfits right there in the Barren Lands. If the faith these early prospectors, possibly a smelter, now the numerous links satisfactory except by the gas of four winter seasons. One opinion prophesied to me that there would eventually arise there a smaller larger town than that created at Tinian, and that cost something like \$2,000,000. For here, he said, there were copper mines, possibly the largest and richest in the world. That, of course, remains to be proved. But the faith of these mining men who have seen close-up the distant vision of the Great Bear to the shaft of sunlight in the gloom of this depression. But they say unselfishly enough, the chances are this copper will not pay until a railroad goes in. Not that a railroad is an impossible dream. In fact, they argue, a case of northern Ontario over again, only on a larger scale. It is there that the Peace River country? Do not its farms and wheat fields already stretch up north to meet the south-facing of the mountains? Does not the railroad run already to Peace River crossing? A mere jump of 100 miles over a level bridge, to be sure, but for the rest no more difficult and very little further than the line from the Pas into Fort Churchill is to the north. Three years should build it, they say.

On to the Arctic Circle AND there is potential traffic to be picked up all the way in this land of widespread mineral wealth. Around Great Slave, on the way up to the Great Bear, are enormous deposits, to be mined, of zinc and lead being developed by Consolidated. Then there is the coal and iron country toward Fort McMurray to be tapped. Coal and iron, it is said, is there, has been benefited here, and is being mined. Do not coal and iron lie in hand for the work of power, concentrating, milling and smelting? Truly, transportation is the big problem in this land of rich minerals where three generations the only settlement has been a few isolated trading posts, many miles apart, and where, until the mining airplanes began to soar like quacking geese, all traffic was by boats which carried men and provisions, and the general past minerals flowed fluid into the porphyry strata of the old sedimentary rocks. Here, then, is this distant treasure house to be explored and exploited, possibly to make men's fortunes and to add to the wealth of Canada. At present the price of copper is around 7 cents a pound, lower than it has been over half the normal price in between 13 and 14 cents—that it is scarcely possible that this Arctic copper could compete with ore nearer their economic base. But if the price should ever come back, why then? From Daniel Lakes, it is said, ore may easily be transported to Coronation Gulf by tractor across the Barren Lands, a mere fifty miles, and shipped out around through the Arctic sea and off to the coast. But that is in the future. In and around Echo and Hunter Bays on Great Bear Lake mining has taken place ever since the

the mineral potential of the Canadian North was sensationalized by southern media during 1932 (The Toronto Star Weekly, January 30, 1932)

## The mineral potential of the Canadian North was sensationalized by southern media during 1932 (The Toronto Star Weekly, January 30, 1932)

Bill Storr and W. Purcell, two trappers from the Arctic Coast followed their own trail to Great Bear, travelling from Coppermine River overland by Inuit dog team in 1932. The dogs dragged a well-constructed wood and seal-skin sled, capable of hauling a ton of supplies. <sup>21</sup> Two of the more infamous prospectors to participate were George and Ted Girouard. These unassuming Detroit brothers flew their own plane to Edmonton in the spring of 1932, promptly selling it in exchange for a season's worth of supplies and a canoe. They paddled to Great Bear Lake via the Marian-Camsell River route, staked silver claims, and left the north. Early in the new year, George and Ted robbed a Toronto bank and escaped with \$3,000, an apparent desperate attempt to get money to develop their silver claims. One of the brothers was injured during a gun fight and captured at the scene. The other was caught a week later in New York. <sup>22</sup>

Several world adventurers made the trek north. Major Lockie T. Burwash was a well-known explorer and anthropologist that mapped significant parts of the Arctic Coastline while searching for the remains of Sir John Franklin's 1845 naval expedition. Burwash joined forces with Bear Exploration and Radium Limited who found silver at Contact

Lake and became their field manager. Harold ‘Walco’ Crowley, former pilot for the Forbes-Grenfell expedition which mapped the entire Labrador coast in 1931, and Charles Hubbard, a Harvard football captain of 1926 and big game hunter of many continents, both organized expeditions from Boston to Great Bear.<sup>23</sup>

A swash of claims was staked from Labine Point to Hunter Bay, 35 miles to the north. At least 1,000 claims were recorded by the start of the 1932 summer season. Many claims were staked in the dead of winter and so it is fair to say that little of this ground was claimed based on geological interpretation or other observational insight. Men staked because they could, and if they didn’t, someone else would. The Great Bear Lake rush, like others before, was based on the principal of “closeology”, tying onto ground as close to the centre of the original mineral discovery as possible, and hoping that something of value might be found later.

The competitive nature of a staking rush is illustrated by this story that comes out of Great Bear Lake. A prospector was staking a claim high on a hill when he was called down by a man on the lake ice. Never one to not heed the call of a stranger in the harsh arctic, the man temporarily abandoned his staking activities and was caught in conversation with the stranger. In the meantime, two of the stranger’s companions snuck up the other side of the hill and quietly annexed the ground which the victim had not finished staking.

The prevalence of rocky hills and cliffs helped focus prospectors’ attention onto gossan zones, areas of metal oxidation where the deposit reaches the surface. Little was known about the regional geology at the time. The mere presence of coloured, rusty oxidized rocks was sure to start rumours of copper, silver, gold and radium, and these reports were picked up by the southern media with little context or scientific analysis. With the arrival of a Geological Survey of Canada party under the direction of Dr. Desmond Kidd in March 1932, good science would ultimately prevail over wildcat stakers and their grandiose predictions of fortune. Mineralization was soon understood to be influenced by contacts between granitic intrusions and the metamorphosed sediments and ancient tectonic activity that created conduits for mineralized fluids coming to surface. Detailed professional mapping would prove the best at determining the value of land holdings.<sup>24</sup>

### **~ Traveling to Great Bear Lake ~**

The airplane, a relatively new invention, was just starting to become a tool for the prospector. Great Bear Lake’s mineral rush relied heavily on the support and expedience of air travel, but most newcomers came north through the ancient water routes of the Mackenzie River watershed. In the 1930s the Northwest Territories was still dependent on the water way system north from Alberta. It was the cheapest way to travel long distances, since there were no roads, and airplanes were too expensive for the average person. As a result, people bought, built, and otherwise scavenged together whatever would float, and set off on their journey.

## How Can I Get to Great Bear Lake ?

**This question is asked at the Bear Lake Miner Office at least twenty times a day — Here is the answer:**

1. If you desire only an inspection trip of the mines and country, take the aeroplane route from McMurray. If you start around the middle of July, you can take in the 4th August Cameron Bay general "miners' get-together" and sports and be back in Edmonton by around the 7th August. Cost, approximately \$500. See Canada Airways or Mackenzie Air Service.
2. If you intend to stay there. It is first necessary for you to have enough money or supplies to see you over a period of at least six months and a return ticket out to be used if you are not satisfied. Cost, around \$800.00.
3. If you make up your mind that the North owes you a living, have good health and natural pioneer adaptability; by this is meant "able to look after yourself", it is a comparatively simple matter to get a canoe or boat, load it with at least six months supplies and outfit, take it to McMurray and, about the 1st June start off down the river. It is a long trip but many have already made it and many more will do it in 1934 and on. Cost, roughly, depends on your needs, but \$800 would give you all you require.
4. Several parties are being made up to go north this year, the plan is that at least 12 persons subscribe \$150 each towards the building of a scow at McMurray. Each subscriber is allowed 600 lbs. of equipment free, the scow is fully loaded and the subscribers work it down the river and on to the mining field. On arrival there they can split and do anything they choose for themselves.
5. Getting a job with a mining company. It costs money to ship a man into a job at Great Bear Lake. Therefore, mining companies hiring men are apt to be very careful as to who they hire. In any case the general plan is to sign men up on from two to five years contract. As most of the mining companies operating in the Great Bear Lake area are Eastern companies, with no offices at Edmonton, the only way to connect up with them is to catch them "on the fly" passing through.
6. In any case be sure of the following. That you are physically fit. That you have no outside ties to worry you. That you are willing to live on "what have you" at any time. That you know how to take care of yourself under all pioneer conditions and that you will not squeal if fate gives you a few rubs. If you have these qualifications, the Bear Lake Miners' advice is "Go to it". There is going to be many a dollar made North of 53.

**Advice from the Bear Lake Miner magazine on how to get north.  
(Bear Lake Miner May 1934)**

A large contingent of settlers were from the Peace River district of Alberta where crops had failed during the depression years. Harry Weaver was a freight operator on the Peace and owned the once eminent Beulah Boat Company. Now, after 14 years of business, Weaver was looking to the north, and in 1933 he began to refit his boats for the journey to Great Bear Lake. Although he never did make it as far north as he wished Weaver did establish important trade connections into the Northwest Territories and would eventually open a trading post at Yellowknife on Great Slave Lake.<sup>25</sup>

Weaver might have met up with Dick Brinkman and Martin Bode from Spirit River, also floating down the Peace. In 1933 they built a large scow with two paddle wheels propelled by a Fordson gas tractor. They formed part of a large flotilla of improvised crafts going down the Peace River towards the deadly Vermillion Chutes where skill was required to successfully navigate the rapids. Many of the boats also carried trailers and trucks to haul their entire outfits over the 16-mile portage on the Slave River to Fort Smith.<sup>26</sup>

## A Prospector's Equipment For Summer Work

A proper outfit of supplies and equipment suitable for the particular needs of Northern mining and exploration is of the utmost importance. These can be obtained in Edmonton from business houses experienced in equipping Northern parties for over a hundred years.

The following is a suggested list of supplies necessary for two men for 100 days in the field:

### CAMP EQUIPMENT FOR BASE

Heavy canvas tent.  
 Mosquito netting.  
 Collapsible camp stove, complete with pipes and asbestos ring.  
 Two eiderdown sleeping bags.  
 Two waterproof ground sheets.  
 One light, one heavy axe, carborundum stone and files.  
 Spools of copper wire, nails, auger and bit, bucksaw.  
 Pots and pans, fry pan, tea pot, coffee pot.  
 Pitch, copper rivets, canvas, thread and awls.  
 Pick or mattock and shovel.  
 Mortar and pestle (Iron).  
 Box of explosives, fuse and caps.  
 Heavy and light rope.  
 A few dozen small canvas bags, heavy duck.  
 Small assay outfit, including blow torch.  
 Candles, electric torch and batteries.  
 First-aid kit and a few drugs.

### FIELD EQUIPMENT

Sheath knife, compass, aneroid.  
 One pair field glasses, camera and films.  
 .22 rifle, 30.30 carbine and cartridges.  
 2 light haversacks, 2 heavy pack bags.  
 Geological picks, fish hooks, trolling spoons, and fish line.  
 Canoe with outboard motor.  
 Aluminum cooking outfit, primus stove with oil.  
 Magnifying glass, small mosquito-proof tent.

### CLOTHING

Canvas parka.  
 Boots, heavy underclothing.  
 Light rubber canvas shoes.  
 Windbreaker.  
 Hat, fur cap, mitts (several pairs), light cotton gloves (several pairs).  
 Heavy socks, moccasins.  
 Overalls, leather boots.  
 Sweater, light underwear.

### FOOD SUPPLIES (Basis 2 Men—100 Days)

	lbs.	oz.		lbs.	oz.
Onions, dried	14		Flour	180	
Baking Powder	4		Rolled Oats	18	
Salt	10		Rice	12	
Pepper		8	Cornmeal	10	
Yeast		8 boxes	Whole Wheat Flour	20	
Soap		10 bars	Split Peas	6	
Dried Fruit		34	Bacon	120	
Raisins		8	Sugar	75	
Currants		2	Tea	8	
Jam		12	Coffee	6	
Matches		2 ctns.	Butter	30	
Mustard		8	Cheese	10	
Macaroni		7	Milk Powder	20	
Tobacco		7	Beans	50	
Towelling.			Potatoes (Des.)	26	

### Recommended provisions for the journey. (Bear Lake Miner May 1934)

A boat captain along the river of some notoriety was Jack Randall, a bootlegger that ran contraband whiskey from Nova Scotia to New Orleans at the height of prohibition in the schooner *I'm Alone*. Captain Randall was caught by the American coastguard after an intense standoff that saw his schooner was fired upon, sunk, and his entire crew detained. It turned out the *I'm Alone* was far enough out to sea that the Americans had no right to engage. After verging on a diplomatic crisis between Canada and the United States, Randall and his crew were released from prison, and headed north. In 1933, he was captain of another small schooner dragging mining supplies up the Bear River. The crew fought hard to run the swift river rapids but at the end of it all, Randall and his partners had a dramatic falling out, the Captain abandoning his post while screaming, "It's nicer hauling whiskey for thirsty Americans than hauling freight for crazy Canadians!"<sup>27</sup>

Randall was an entertaining storyteller and could spin yarns about his many exploits as a mariner. His stories were picked up by newspapers and people who wrote about their

northern adventures were sure to mention Randall. As a writer himself, Randall contributed at least one feature article for *The Edmonton Bulletin*, entitled “The Radium Lure”, which documented the 1932 journey of a group of Albertan cowboys, their wives, and livestock on the crudest scow he had ever seen. The party had never been north nor had ever sailed on lakes as big as Great Slave or Great Bear. They were enthusiastic to a point of being overzealous of their odds of success. Randall described the craft:

She was a scow forty feet long, about twelve feet beam, and built of the roughest kind of rough boards. On the forward end was a pigsty containing two 300-pound hogs. Tethered to the pigsty was a billy goat. Aft of that, on a flimsy structure, was a twelve-by-twelve tent, with a camp bed, a cooking stove, and a rough table. Aft of the tent stood an old motor truck lashed down to the scow and weighted by drums of gasoline.

At the Slave River portage, the craft was dismantled, the truck rolling off the scow to haul the supplies and livestock over the portage, returning to hitch up to the empty scow which was instantly modified into a wheeled trailer. It was an amazing sight, but what was more amazing was the success of the party and their make-shift craft, making it as far as Fort Norman when Randall encountered it. From there, the cowboy’s plan was to install skis and drag the scow up the Bear River that winter. We can now only guess at the success of this outfit.<sup>28</sup>

Many would-be prospectors travelled modestly in the classic freighter canoe, including Manitoba-bred Fred J. Peet. He studied the maps and concluded that a canoe trip across Great Slave and up the Marian River, across the divide to the Camsell River, and downstream to Great Bear, a traditional Dene route connecting the two great lakes, would be the fastest route. The Marian River route was a backdoor approach meant to give him a head start in the rush since the Marian and Camsell Rivers would be free of ice before navigation across Great Bear Lake from the west could begin. Great Bear Lake ice sometimes does not melt until well into July.

Peet acquired financial backing and was ‘grubstaked’ in a deal where no wages were paid, but credit for supplies could be acquired and any claims staked were jointly owned by the syndicate of financiers. Olaf Staaten, one of the partners, joined Fred Peet for the journey. They made good time down the Slave River and hop-scotched the islands of Great Slave Lake to the North Arm as ice receded. The 125-mile ascent up the Marian River was the greatest challenge. Paddling up the swift river was augmented by a small outboard motor, yet this extra payload and its fuel came back to haunt them on the many portages. It was slow going, battling current, exhaustion, and insect, made all the more intense by the sight of daily aircraft flying overhead on their way to the mining rush. Peet wrote, “...our ambition and desire to speed up and get there increased. We took chances we should not have taken.”<sup>29</sup>

The Camsell River-Marian Rivers route (also known as the Fort Rae to Great Bear route, since Rae, now Behchoko, was the trading post at its start) was described in some detail by *The Bear Lake Miner*, a monthly newsletter out of Edmonton published during

the height of the radium rush in 1933-1934. Information was based on James Macintosh Bell's 1900 trip out of the north via rivers. It is not known how many prospectors traveled this direction to get to and from Great Bear Lake but considering it offered the shortest distance via water travel, and was also the route that airplanes flew over, it was undoubtedly a well-used thoroughfare. *The Bear Lake Miner* wrote in 1934:

In discussing the route from Fort Rae to Cameron Bay, concerning which there is no question of doubt that in years to come will be the most logical winter connection between Rae and the mining areas, it is interesting to note that for many years, the Indians resident in the area have made a practise of visiting the Fort Rae post at intervals for the purpose of trade and barter. There is therefore a well defined pack trail route at the present time between Fort Rae and Cameron Bay. <sup>30</sup>

Steve Yanik and Shorty Weldon also travelled the Marian-Camsell Route. From Fort Smith they moved via a skiff, a flat bottom boat with motor, to Fort Rae exchanging the skiff for a 17-foot canoe. The river route required seven days of hard paddle and 83 portages. Yanik got a job at Eldorado Mine blasting the first round from the tunnel in 1932. He, and 16 other men, lived in a small log bunkhouse on double-decker log pole bunks. Later, Yanik built a large 2-storey cabin at Cameron Bay (Block 1, Lot 18) and water-freighted up 600 bags of potatoes for resale. <sup>31</sup>

It is assumed that most travellers, with their supply laden boats, stuck to the main thoroughfare - the mighty Mackenzie River, a proven waterway with established trading posts and few navigation challenges. Fort Norman (Tulita) was the final stop for men and freight heading to the radium and silver mines via the Mackenzie River. The small Hudson's Bay Company trading post was located at the confluence where the Bear River flows into the Mackenzie and was a comfortable place to wait for the Great Bear Lake to open. Boats going up the Bear River had to be sufficiently shallow draft for the ascent while equally seaworthy to cross the massive lake. Several sets of rapids interrupt the Bear River, forcing larger boats to set up winch lines to pull them against the current. <sup>32</sup>

Mining activity revitalized the waterways of the Northwest Territories. Waterborne traffic between Fort Smith and the arctic coast was historically dominated by the Hudson's Bay Company who operated a common freight business and carried regular mail. Its large paddlewheeler the *S.S. Distributor* serviced trading posts along the Mackenzie River while smaller motor vessels operated along the tributaries. The years of HBC dominance ended with the arrival of new private enterprises joining the radium rush. Northern Waterways Limited was the rejuvenation of Northern Traders Company old freighting arm, acquired from liquidation of the trading firm's assets. Canadian Airways Limited was the owner with the sole agenda to establish gasoline caches along the Mackenzie River. Its scope broadened as a common freight carrier for mining interests when the company rebranded as Northern Transportation Company Limited (NTCL). <sup>33</sup> NTCL built a number of new boats, including the *M.S. Great Bear* that inaugurated service by racing the HBC's new *M.V. Hearne Lake* on their maiden 'voyages' by winch line up the Bear River rapids, in 1934. <sup>34</sup>



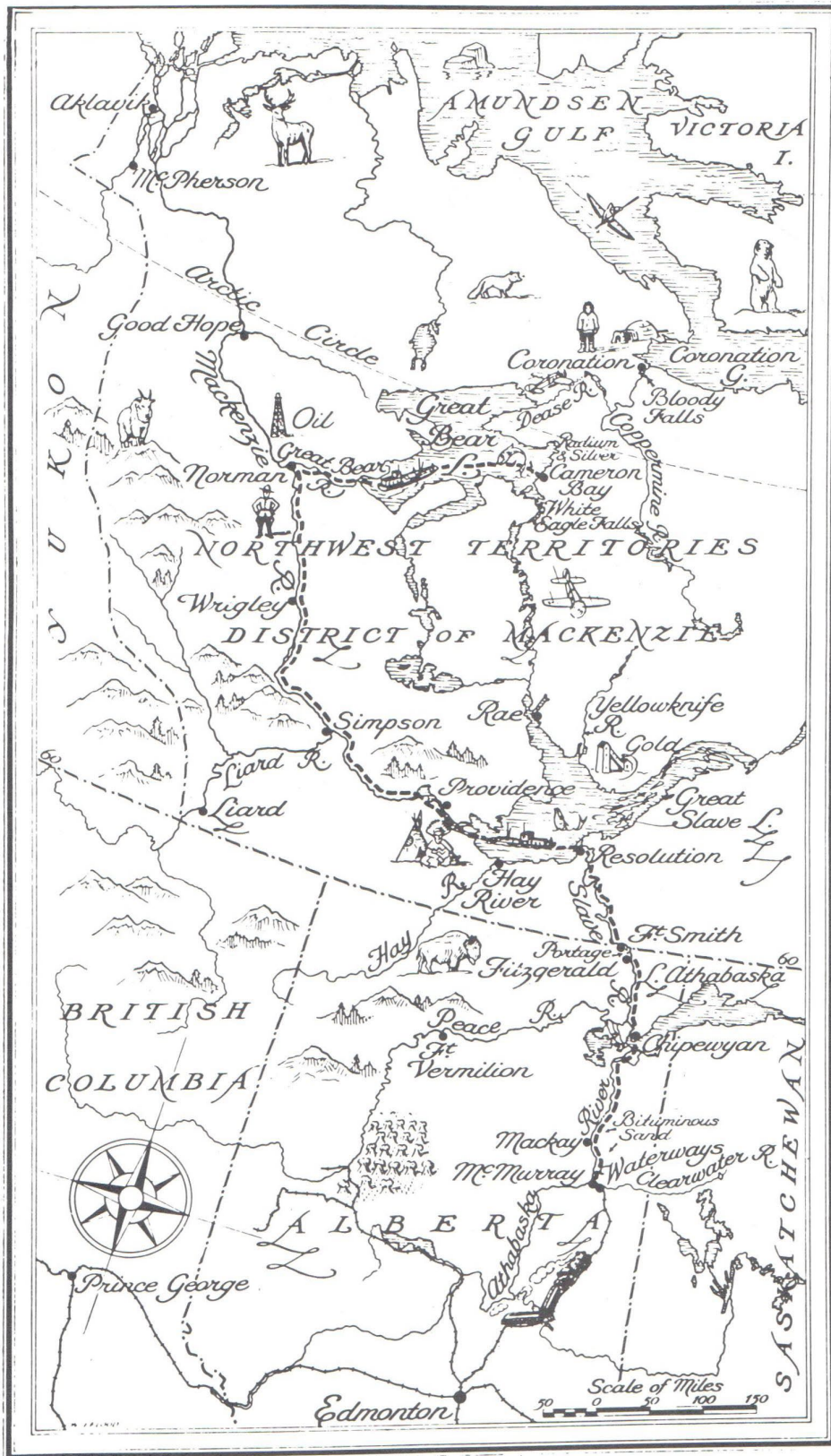


**The “M.S. Great Bear” launched by Northern Transportation Company Limited in 1934. It operated on Great Bear Lake until 1960.  
(NWT Archives/N-1998-015:0152)**

By 1935, NTCL had a fleet of six diesel-powered tugs, ten barges, and transportation facilities on both the Slave River and the new Bear River portage, capable of moving 1000 tons of freight per week.<sup>35</sup> White Eagle Mines Limited was a majority shareholder of NTCL until the mining company went bankrupt in 1936. Eldorado Gold Mines Limited picked up 100% control of the assets to serve its mining operations, but as part of the deal the fleet would continue to operate as a freighting business throughout the north. Efficient shipping was key to the success of the Eldorado Mine. In 1937, NTCL built an oil pipeline over the portage at Bear River rapids and improved the most difficult eight-mile section of the road. Transfer facilities, wharfs, and a new fleet of tugs and barges were built.<sup>36</sup> NTCL commissioned two steel-hull diesel tugs in 1937, the *Radium Queen* and the *Radium King*, and many steel barges with shallow draughts. These were all a part of NTCL’s “Radium Line”, a network of river service between Waterways, Alberta and all points along the Mackenzie River and on the Great lakes.<sup>37</sup>

As an entity of Eldorado, NTCL had the important task of moving mine product out of Great Bear Lake. Crews packed jute-sacks of powdered minerals on and off boats as a daily routine. These bags, while only the size of a narrow pillow, were packed with concentrated metals weighing up to 100 pounds.

Northern Transportation’s appearance in the north has been credited with the significant reduction in freight rates at that time. In 1930, the rate between Waterways and Aklavik, the most northern post, was \$9.75 per 100 pounds; by 1939 this rate was lowered to \$2.50. The disruption of the Hudson’s Bay Company monopoly was a big benefit and it aided in lowering the costs of exploring, developing, and ultimately opening mines in the NWT. It was under the guidance of Eldorado that NTCL became, by 1948, the dominant commercial carrier on the northern waterways.<sup>38</sup>



Routes to Great Bear Lake. (Canadian Geographic Magazine, March 1937)



## ~ Dene Participants in the Rush ~

Mining activity was a curiosity to the original Dene inhabitants of the Mackenzie River Valley. The Sahtu Dene traditional migratory habits were to hunt for caribou along the east shore of Great Bear Lake in the summer, retreating back to the west shore of the lake and the Mackenzie River valley in the winter. It is likely that many Dene groups also stayed the winter in the area, especially around the Dease Arm where they traded with the Inuit. Mining and prospecting activity offered new incentives to settle around Echo Bay.



**Edward Blondin with dog team. (NWT Archives/N-1979-052:1721)**

Sahtu Dene stories give credit to Old Man Beyonnie in kicking off the mineral rush to Great Bear Lake. “There was a whiteman who worked in Port Radium. My father found a good rock, so he gave it to him and the whiteman said it’s a worthless rock. Three years later they said Labine found the rock.”<sup>39</sup> The sequence of events that fits the story of Beyonnie into the larger history of prospecting at Echo Bay and Gilbert Labine’s activity is vague, but it does illustrate the active roles Dene played in the search for minerals.

Early in the rush, chief Jimmy Soldat of the “Bear Lake” people camped in the middle of the action. Soldat was not a stranger to outside visitors nor to metals. He had worked with John Hornby and Viljmer Stefansson and had once observed rich silver near what became the El-Bonanza Mine.<sup>40</sup> The influx of prospectors and traders offered the Dene people new avenues to trade fur catches for tools and technology. Some settled closer to the mining camps to take advantage of what they had to offer, not just in trade, but in jobs. They acted as guides to prospectors, and even staked claims. During treaty payment of 1934, the Indian Agent in Fort Resolution made special note of the seven Dogrib (Tlicho Dene) men from Fort Rae “participating in taking claims” at Great Bear Lake and receiving “a certain annuity for their share”.<sup>41</sup> Journalist Frederick Watt saw the Dene as active participants in mineral activity:

They are the ones who have precluded the white man’s rush and who are cutting a line north of the proven field at a prodigious amount a day...Not only are they blocking in large areas of ground, but they are collecting samples as they go. Their interest in geology, sketchy though it may be, is

filled with the greatest of enthusiasm. In a few days they will mush back to Fort Norman, but their announced intention is to return as soon as they have bought new grubstakes...<sup>42</sup>

One of these men was Slavey Dene Joe Dillon, an RCMP special constable, who staked important silver claims at White Eagle Falls in 1933 and successfully sold them. The plan was for Joe, who had never in his life been below Fort Smith, to holiday to San Francisco and buy a set of gold teeth for him and the girlfriend, proclaiming that wealth should be shown off to the world.<sup>43</sup>

Great Bear Lake was also where the famous Arden family got their start at prospecting. Darcy Arden, a former park warden, began trading at Great Bear Lake in the 1920s and married a Sahtu Dene woman, raising three Metis sons at Cameron Bay: Hughie, Jimmy, and Sonny (Darcy junior). Arden was a pioneer prospector in the Hottah Lake-Beaverlodge Lake area, south of Great Bear Lake on the Camsell River, where he staked radioactive deposits in 1934. It was said that his wife's Dene family had pointed the way to the interesting formations. The claims would see significant interest in the following years although no economic silver or radium mine was proved. Arden and family later moved to Yellowknife where Hughie, Sonny, and Jimmy all contributed to the search for minerals and had a reputation for excellent woodsmen.<sup>44</sup>

Eventually, many Dene came to work at the mines, cutting wood for the boilers, selling fish to the cooks, and as labourers hauling freight. Later, when uranium mining intensified at Eldorado-Port Radium during and after World War Two, opportunities for work increased. Those jobs continued to be labour intensive grunt work and included hauling sacks of the radioactive uranium ores from the docks into the holds of cargo boats. Few understood the risks associated with the mine product, and many workers, particularly the Dene of the Sahtu region, had long-term health issues as a result.<sup>45</sup>

### ~ The Birth of a Settlement ~

Not counting the activity at Gilbert Labine's Eldorado Mine, the first prospector and trader camps in the Great Bear Lake-Echo Bay region were around the shores of Lindsley Bay, north of Eldorado. One of these grew up around the tent of Ed Demelt, on the south side of Lindsley Bay. A fisherman and trapper from the Hay River area, Demelt was one of the first prospectors to follow the news of Labine's strike, staking a swath of claims at the bay in 1932. Demelt was a chief authority on the area's history, geography, and people. Frederick Watt called him "a walking map of the district". His status led to an appointment as Emergency Recorder for mineral claims. As an authority of the region, Demelt was the go-to-guy and Demelt Cove, as his campground on Lindsley Bay became known, was an ideal place for prospectors to congregate.<sup>46</sup>

The transportation companies thought otherwise. Spence-McDonough Air Transportation (SMAT) was formed in March 1931 and established an air base and radio station further up the shore of Lindsley Bay in 1932, opposite Mackenzie Island. Activity focused on this sector with the arrival of Dr. Desmond Kidd of the Geological Survey of

Canada, Fred P. Failes of *The Northern Miner* newspaper, various syndicates and companies, and the former Russian Prince, Leo Galitzine, who fled to Canada following the fall of the Romanov regime in 1917. Rich beyond rich, the Prince hired a pilot and established Great Bear Lake Airways. The Russian Prince fit in well:

He has taken to snowshoes with the best of them, has staked his own claims and has proven a popular addition to the community. His long legs have kept pace with those of the hardiest bushman in covering the white trails of the area. He is 'Prince' to everyone in the same spirit that other men are 'Joe' or 'Jack' or 'Bill'.<sup>47</sup>



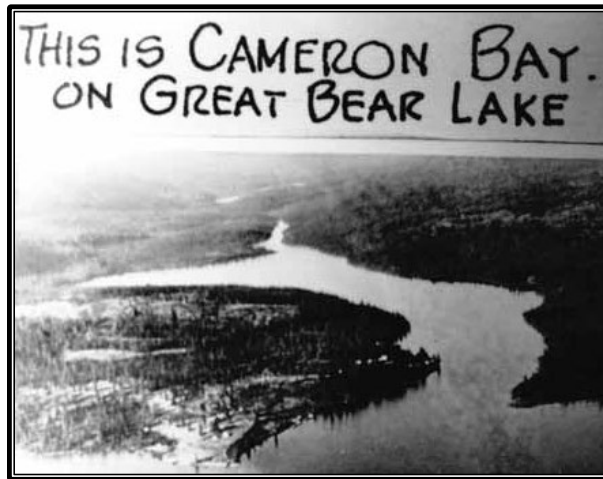
**SMAT settlement on Lindsley Bay, 1932. (Rex Terpening photo)**

SMAT, as the camp was called, took on a following. Fred P. Failes of *The Northern Miner* unexpectedly became the first shopkeeper. Expecting the worst conditions for their reporter, the Ontario newspaper firm made sure plenty of supplies and food were forwarded to Great Bear Lake. These being in near surplus, Failes sold much of it to prospectors who were unable to secure supplies from any other source. There was also strong demand for a new wireless station at Great Bear Lake. The Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, the government communicate arm busy expanding a network of radio stations across the Northwest Territories and Yukon, was sent to SMAT in 1932.

The choice of settlement at Lindsley Bay was contested by the growth of a new town located within the inner reaches of Echo Bay. At the end of the portage trail leading south of Ed Demelt's camp on Lindsley Bay to Echo Bay was a sheltered body of water called Cameron Bay. Where does the name come from? Jack Cameron, an early fur trader in Hay River in the 1920s-1930s, would later, in a 1949 interview, claim that the bay was named after him, having spent time prospecting at Great Bear Lake in 1933.<sup>48</sup> Fred Peet agreed with this history, as Jack Cameron had staked some of the first claims around Cameron Bay.<sup>49</sup> Less evidence points in favour of prospecting brothers Don and Archie Cameron, or professor Allen E. Cameron of the Geological Survey of Canada, but these gentleman surely had opportunity to visit the region and spread ingratiating rumours.<sup>50</sup>

In the spring of 1932, prospectors began to erect tents on the north end of Cameron Bay on the portage trail. Spring melt proved that this was a swampy spot. The tents were

dismantled and reappeared on the sandy and dry opposite shore.<sup>51</sup> It was an ideal location for a town, protected by the wild winds of the main lake, and scenically situated on a lightly forested sand bar dominated by a backdrop of mountainous hills. Early rivalry between SMAT and Cameron Bay existed, and the ones in support of having all government offices and services at Cameron Bay jockeyed the redundancies of what they referred to as “SMUT”. Cameron Bay was closer to the center of mining activity, they argued, and therefore more convenient for companies and prospectors.



**Aerial view of Cameron Bay in 1932.  
(City of Edmonton Archives/EA-10-3181-37-5)**

The market ultimately decided, and by autumn 1932 it was clear that SMAT had lost the battle to the burgeoning Cameron Bay settlement. The government mining recorder, Mackay Meikle, set up his tent at Cameron Bay that spring. Anybody dealing with mining property would need to see Mr. Meikle and so pitching a tent near him was best for business. Other prominent settlers followed his example and so a town was born.<sup>52</sup>

### **~ Murphy Services Limited ~**

Influential in Cameron Bay’s early development was Gerry Murphy who came to Great Bear Lake early during the rush and quickly became the district’s chief outfitter. It was he that first erected a tent on the sand bar of Cameron Bay, enticing prospectors to move across from the swampy side of the bay. His business was called Murphy Services Limited. Originally housed in an oversized canvas tent, he eventually expanding into log cabins. Murphy Services had a variety of roles in the early community. The log cabin served as post office, agent office for Canadian Airways, and expeditor. Partners in Murphy Services were Vic Ingraham, formerly of Fort Smith and associate of Ryan Brothers Transport, and Tim Ramsey, an Edmonton businessman and financial backer.

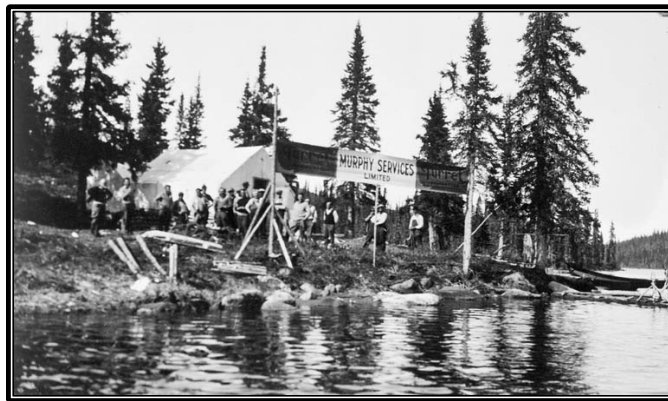
The *Edmonton Journal* announced the new enterprise in April 1932:

Buildings for this company now are under construction at Cameron Bay, an arm of Great Bear Lake. One of the structures will be used for a store,

one for sleeping quarters, and the third for a cook house. Two 20-foot boats which will be equipped with outboard motors also are being built for the company. These probably will be in strong demand as the rough nature of the country makes it essential to travel by water whenever it is possible.

The purpose of the new firm is to furnish supplies and motor boat transportation on the lake to companies already in the country and newcomers as well. Up to the present, transport about the lake has been by means of aeroplane services, machines taxing to various points. <sup>53</sup>

Another of their enterprises was the *Musk Ox Saloon*, a hotel, recreation hall, and restaurant rolled into a tiny 20-foot log cabin decorated with the skulls of muskoxen. It was the start of Vic Ingraham's venture into the liquor business and the bootlegging that follows. Murphy and Ingraham eventually abandoned their restaurant and hotel to focus on water freighting and commercial milling using the motor schooner *Speed II* and some small barges. Their property at Cameron Bay spanned Block 1, Lots 6 to 13, where a collection of log cabins grew in 1932-1933.



**Murphy Services first tent, 1932. (National Archives/C-070520)**

Murphy Services was the first freighting business and made a killing on the needs of the various prospectors, drilling contractors, and mining ventures. Gerry Murphy was one of the busiest and most influential in the mining camp, and this led to his title as 'Unofficial Mayor of Cameron Bay'. Murphy and Vic Ingraham operated an eclectic business for the first two years. Their freighting arm took up most of their time, but they also operated a sawmill on McVicar's Arm, on the south shore of the lake.

The entire business was marred by the sinking of the *Speed II* on Great Bear Lake, leading to Murphy Service's ultimate bankruptcy while elevating Vic Ingraham to a northern legend. On October 20, 1933, the *Speed II* was crewed by skipper Ingraham, engineer Harry Jebb, and deckhands Stu Currie and Molberg, and they were pulling a small barge of supplies across Great Bear Lake from Fort Franklin to Cameron Bay with seven passengers. The end of the shipping season was drawing closer, with 35 tons of freight to move across the big lake. It was important stuff - machinery and supplies for construction at the silver mines, and food stores for an entire population of miners preparing for a long winter. Vic Ingraham was determined to get it safely back to port.



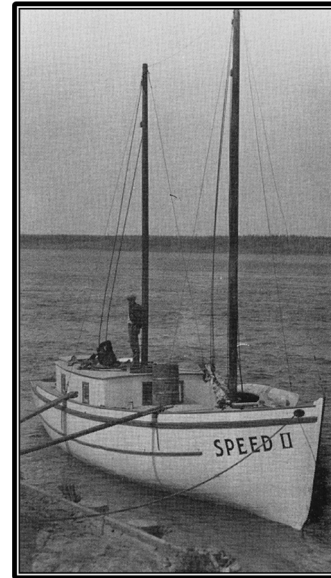
**Murphy Services offices, 1933. (National Archives/PA-101659)**

The *Speed II* chugged across the huge lake just as a fall storm hit. By hugging the southern shoreline and hiding in the protective coves near the McVicar Arm they avoided the worst of the weather. At one of these harbours where Murphy Services operated a sawmill, deckhand Molberg was replaced by Jimmy Potts. The date was now October 26, and the fall storm was feeling more and more like winter. Temperatures of  $-26^{\circ}\text{C}$  could be felt and the early signs of ice froze the shorelines. There was no turning back now, the ships engines too weak to overpower the gale and bring them safely back to shore. The boat and its barge were blown off course, to the north, and deeper into peril.

The heavy barge was a block of ice, its crew unable to keep it aligned with the lingering course of its smaller tug. The procedure was clear: cut the tow lines to the barge or risk the destruction of the boat. The craft drifted away out of sight carrying its passengers and cargo. Another day of turbulent winds and waves passed. The crew of the *Speed* had another problem: it was out of gas. Deckhand Harry Jebb, exhausted and sick by this point, had retired to his cabin bunk. Vic Ingraham instructed Jimmy Potts to carefully refuel, but the rocking of the ship caused gasoline drums to spill on the deck. It was not long before a spark caught the gasoline, and the entire deck was engulfed. Both Jebb and Potts were trapped beneath the deck and perished to smoke and fire. Stu Currie and Ingraham had little time to react, jumping onboard a small rubber raft in time for the *Speed II* to fully ignite and sink into the chilly waves of Great Bear.

Surviving the next days was the greatest challenge. The passengers of the barge drifted away separately, landing on the north shore of Great Bear Lake just east of Caribou Point and with enough supplies to last them months. Ingraham and Currie landed on the same shore several miles to the east after seven hours on the waves, suffering severe burns and frostbite. Ingraham was the worst for wear. His moccasins had been burned completely off his feet, his legs a block of ice, and fingers badly burned and frostbitten too. Hunger, exhaustion, and pain was great, but the two men had to bear it, for they were in the middle of nowhere without food or shelter. Stu was thoughtful enough to keep matches in his pockets, the tips frozen over with ice preserving them. They made a fire and the two castaways dried out their clothes. The situation remained dire. It was walk or perish.

Logic told them where the barge would have landed, so they walked west towards Caribou Point. Ingraham, nearly blind and frozen, walked with incredible stamina and will, guided by the encouragement of his friend. Two days later they came upon the barge and the remaining survivors. The stranded group collected what freight and provisions they could, set up a camp, and shot a moose. Amongst the cargo were three huskie dogs. Two of the men hoped to set out for Cameron Bay with the dog team but the ice was too thin for travel. Vic Ingraham could not wait for rescue. His condition was extremely precarious. Two of the men decided to walk the distance to Cameron Bay along the shoreline. For six days and 210 kilometers they walked, rounding the deep bays of the east arm, with limited food and stopping for few rests.



**Murphy Services' "Speed II" schooner. (Fred Peet photo)**

A search party was already on the lookout when the *Speed II* and its crew became overdue. Pilot Harry Hayter began his search on October 29, 1933 along the south and west shores of Great Bear. On November 8, Hayter set forth again from Cameron Bay, this time surveying the north shore of the lake. An hour later, the two survivors walked into Cameron Bay with tale of the tragedy. At almost the exact same time, Hayter spotted the derelict barge and survivors. All were rescued, and Ingraham was flown to the nearest hospital at Aklavik and placed into the best medical care offered. He still lost both legs below the knees, and three fingers on each hand. It is said that when rescued, he was more concerned with the tardy delivery of freight than his own health.<sup>54</sup>



**Vic Ingraham with his beaver scroll, 1934. (The Edmonton Journal, August 10, 1934)**

Vic Ingraham returned to Great Bear Lake in 1934 for the annual August picnic and was presented with a testimonial gift in recognition for his bravery: a tanned beaver pelt with the name every prospector, trapper, and miner from Fort McMurray to Aklavik. Many of these people also contributed to a fund that assisted with his medical expenses. That beaver pelt is still cherished by the Ingraham family today.

Murphy Service went bankrupt as a result of the sinking of the *Speed II*, and its assets were in receivership in 1934 and eventually sold off by creditors. The sawmill on McVicar Arm was acquired by Ted Cinnamon, while the restaurant was acquired by Tony and Marie Onraet and renamed the "Radium Café". Vic Ingraham stayed in Cameron Bay and became postmaster.

## ~ A Natural Harbour for Airplanes ~

The discovery of minerals at Great Bear Lake was thanks to the airplane and the bird-eye view it afforded Gilbert Labine during his 1929 visit. Great Bear's mineral rush demonstrated the value of airplanes in ferrying men, supplies, and mine product in and out of the north. The mines were reasonably accessible, only a 12-hour flight from Edmonton, and with each successful flight, services improved. Alas, no pioneering venture into the arctic comes without challenges and fatal mistakes.

Canadian Airways, formed in 1930 with the amalgamation of Western Canada Airways, Commercial Airways, and a host of other nation-wide operators, was the first in the field. For years they held a huge monopoly on aviation into the NWT through their role as official mail carrier on the Fort McMurray-Aklavik route, with service to all communities on the Slave-Mackenzie Rivers. The new mining field introduced a route from Fort Resolution across Great Slave Lake to Fort Rae, and then across 380 kilometers of boreal forest to Great Bear Lake. It was considered the most remote scheduled air route in Canada. Freight and passenger activity to Great Bear Lake represented a great profit for the company, who handled over 1.8 million pounds of freight and express, compared to only 700,000 pounds in 1931, while freight and passenger mileage in 1932 represented over one million miles of direct flight, double that of 1931.<sup>55</sup>

Competition came early. In March 1931, Bill Spence and John McDonough formed the Spence-McDonough Air Transportation company with six planes and built their base on the north end of Lindsley Bay for two Fairchild planes. They also operated a small wireless station for handling emergency radiograms. Bill Spence was a dare devil pilot but very capable. He could land a plane, unload the freight, and be back in the air within five minutes, flying daily between Fort McMurray and Great Bear, a trip of 1,200 miles both ways, in almost any weather imaginable. Frequently their planes would be forced down by bad weather and the pilots would hold up for a night on unmapped lakes with nothing but a small pup tent and blow pot to keep the plane's engine warm. Long flights were accompanied by the constant lullaby of the engine, a droning sound that tempted rest for dreary eyes. Despite the risks, Spence-McDonough made good money in that first year of the rush. Fate caught up with the venture in early 1933 when Bill Spence was killed in a crash near The Pas, Saskatchewan.<sup>56</sup>

They were not the first casualty of frontier aviation in the north country. On July 14, 1930, a Dominion Explorers plane piloted by James Vance plummeted to his death in Hunter Bay when he lost his bearings in a fog. Canadian Airways pilot Andy Cruickshank with two mechanics Horace Torrie and Harry King crashed into the side of a fog-obscured hill near Mazenod Lake, between Fort Rae and Great Bear, on June 9, 1932. Then on January 31, 1933, another Canadian Airways pilot Paul Calder and mechanic Bill Nadin perished in a crash on Grouard Lake on the Camsell River. Accidents were often due to weather conditions and the pilots learned to respect the awesome and unpredictable power of climate in the sub arctic.<sup>57</sup>





**Canadian Airways base at Cameron Bay on left. (NWT Archives/N-1992-213:0155)  
Mackenzie Air Services base on right. Note the tall weathervane or wind turbine.  
(National Archives of Canada/Eldorado Collection)**

Commercial companies that were active in the Great Bear Lake field in the period 1930-1933 were Canadian Airways Limited, Mackenzie Air Services, Explorers Air Transport, Spence-McDonough Air Transportation, and Great Bear Airways. Canadian Airways came to own most of the above companies by 1933. It was the most successful airline company in the NWT in the 1930s and grew into a major player in the Canadian aviation industry. Its pilots were some of the best: Punch Dickins, Con Farrell, H.H. Kenyon, Walter Gilbert, Archie McMillan, John Blythell, and Wop May. Most were veterans of arctic flying.

Mackenzie Air Services was its direct competitor in the north. The company was started in 1933 by Leigh Brintnell as a strong rival to Canadian Airways. The company was made famous in 1934 when Eldorado Mines leased one of its Bellanca freighters to access the remote mine. The plane guaranteed flights in and out of the mine for movement of personnel and ensured a steady supply of mine concentrate to its refinery in Port Hope, Ontario. Previously the company relied on the short summer season to freight the concentrates out by barge and rail, but now the aircraft could operate year-round on floats in the summer and skis in the winter, the only break being the freeze-up and break-up periods of the season. The Bellanca aircruiser, CF-AWR, was capable of carrying two-tons of pitchblende and silver concentrate and was christened the *Eldorado Radium Silver Express*. It was a very photogenic plane and popular with the southern media.<sup>58</sup>

Both water and air transport had complementary roles in the servicing of the mines, and without the development and production of the Eldorado Mine at Great Bear Lake, the Northwest Territories would not have benefited from the inauguration of advance services throughout the Mackenzie River Valley.

### ~ The Government Survey ~

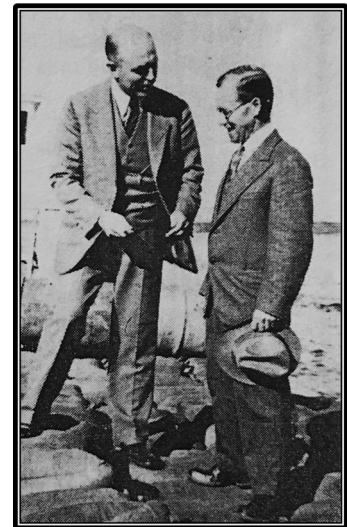
There was a pecuniary interest in the Canadian Government to plan a patterned settlement around the mineral rush to Great Bear Lake. The Dominion Lands Act, the document that guided the administration of crown land in the Northwest Territories, had provisions for the Minister of the Department of the Interior to set aside and reserve from entry for homestead or from sale any lands that he considered to be required for the

purpose of a townsite.<sup>59</sup> There were some legal considerations before the government could survey. The region was blanketed with mineral claims, and the Mining Regulations stipulated that claim owners were entitled to surface rights on application and could build residences. This raised question whether private enterprise should be left to establish its own settlement based on existing regulations, or whether the government should proactively undertake selection of a site. Government man Mackay Meikle was in favour of a properly planned townsite, at Cameron Bay:

In my estimation there is no other location in the Echo Bay district which can compare with Cameron Bay for a townsite. It has the best harbor shelter for lake boats and aeroplanes available, and is centrally located to the most promising properties. There is considerable sloping ground along the base of the nearby hills, with good water frontage, and growth of timber, for a townsite...Cameron Bay lends itself best for the accommodation of the business interests that always develop around an active mining camp.<sup>60</sup>

Meikle had already received inquiries from serious speculators about the availability of land at Cameron Bay, namely the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, larger mining companies, and the Catholic Church who wanted to start a mission and school. Others were asking for Licenses of Occupation to give legitimacy to their squatting. Being a certified Dominion Land Surveyor, Meikle was prepared to draw up preliminary contour maps with the aid of aerial imagery with the goal of an official subdivision survey.

The government had undeniable support for such a community from the people on the ground at Great Bear Lake. Even the owner of the mineral claims that encompassed Cameron Bay wrote to the chairman of the Dominion Lands Board, "anxious to cooperate with the government" and to begin the appropriation of surface rights of his claims. That owner was Mickey Ryan, of northern transportation fame as operator of the portage between Fort Fitzgerald and Fort Smith on the Slave River. Ryan was a top speculator of the commercial possibilities of the new mineral district. He made it clear to government his intentions to start a freighting business and demanded first opportunity for lands and water frontage which had up until now been taken over by squatters.<sup>61</sup>



**Mackay Meikle (on right holding hat) was the first government agent. (Canadian Mining and Metallurgical Bulletin, November 1967)**

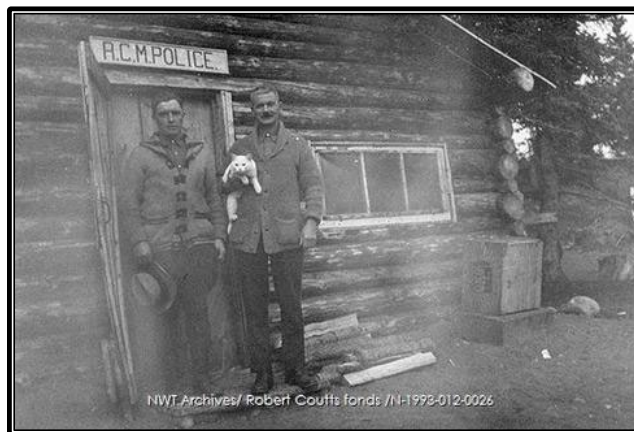
At a meeting of senior officials with the Department of the Interior in January 1933, there was consensus of the need for a surveyed townsite at Cameron Bay for the coming season. In September 1933, Mackay Meikle completed the survey, arranging property by lot and block grids in an attempt to maintain orderly development and to preserve some of the natural contours of the picturesque beach. On

this one point everybody agreed; Cameron Bay was a place of natural beauty, an oasis in the middle of barren Precambrian rocks. Tree growth was preserved wherever possible and a large patch of meadow forest above the beach was set aside as parkland. The survey also spoke of grand hope for the future settlement; streets, never plowed, were named Labine Avenue and Radium Drive.<sup>62</sup>

With the completion of the survey, property was allotted to occupants based on previous patterns of squatting, negotiations with the claim owner, and new applications. Cameron Bay was now an official townsite.

### ~ The Government Arrives ~

Mackay Meikle was the first government agent to have a permanent posting at Cameron Bay in April 1932. His arrival to the district spoke of the government's foresight to the high levels of activity expected in the summer of 1932. In order to provide prospectors and the mining public better service, the Department of the Interior established a recording office at Cameron Bay, acting as a sub-office for Fort Smith. Meikle, with Jack Taylor as his assistant, occupied a small canvas tent and was "up to his neck" in paperwork.<sup>63</sup> Meikle held judicial authority that made him one of the most powerful bureaucrats in the Northwest Territories. He was mining inspector, claims recorder, land agent, parks superintendent, and court magistrate. Meikle's home was Fort Smith where he returned to live during the quieter winter months.

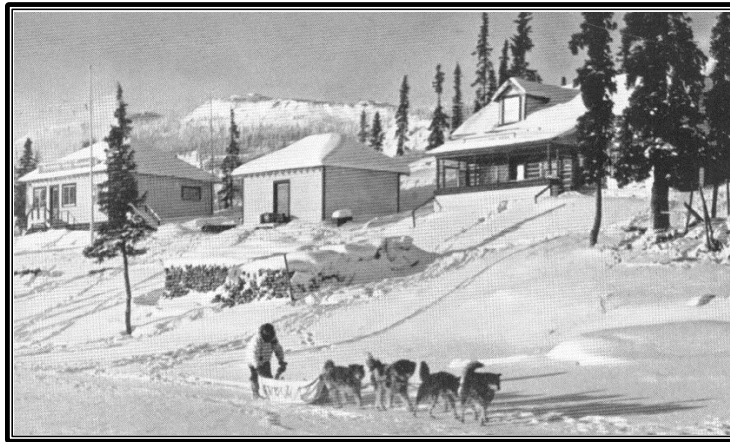


**Robert Cou tts and RCMP sergeant E.G. Baker in the first RCMP detachment at Cameron Bay 1933, Joe Gerhard's cabin. (NWT Archives/N-1993-012:0026)**

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer at Cameron Bay acted as sub-mining recorder during the winter months when prospecting was at low ebb. Patrolling Mounties from Fort Norman made their first visit to Great Bear Lake in the summer of 1932. A permanent post was established in the summer of 1933 with the arrival of Sergeant Ernest G. Baker. The first post was rented from Joe Gerhard's log cabin over the winter of 1933-1934 (Block 1, Lot 23). This was a very uncomfortable building as it was log construction and exposed to the open lake. To stay warm during their day duties, desks were pushed to the centre where the wood stove was.<sup>64</sup>

In 1934, a permanent detachment was built (Block 1, Lot 31). The new building was a three-room house with moose antlers hanging over the entryway. The steel-cage constituting the jail was rarely used, except for secure storage of government-dispensed liquor. Officers collected taxes, issued mining and hunting licenses and distributed Treaty money to the Dene. Crime was unusual. One case involved the theft of gasoline, and the accused was sentenced to splitting cordwood for three weeks at the RCMP post.<sup>65</sup>

Some of the Mounties posted at Cameron Bay included: Sgt. Ernest G. Baker (1933-1935, in charge), Constable James R. MacBrien (1933-1934), Constable James English (1934), Constable King (c.1935), Corporal Jim Davies (1935-1937, in charge 1936-1937), Constable Donald Bliss (1937-1940), Constable Dave Charles Slinn (1935-1938, in charge 1937-1938), Corporal Ted A. Bolstad (1938-1940, in charge), Constable Daniel Clowes (c.1940), and Constable Ernest J. Andrews (c.1943).



**Hudson's Bay Company post with government office on the right.  
(The Beaver Magazine, December 1941)**

An increase in mineral exploration activities after 1933 necessitated the appointment of a permanent government agent to take care of regulatory requirements. Compounding the need for a resident agent was the end of a moratorium that waived requirements of a prospector or mining company to perform annual representation work, owing to the remoteness of the Great Bear Lake. This moratorium expired on October 1, 1934. The Department of the Interior anticipated considerable new prospecting and regulatory filing and proposed a well-equipped local office to handle the workload.

Cameron Bay was upgraded from a sub-office of Fort Smith to a district all to itself. Under Order in Council P.C. 385 dated February 28, 1934, Mackay Meikle, mining inspector, was appointed mining recorder, agent of Dominion Lands and Crown Timber Agent for the Great Bear Lake Mining District, with headquarters at Cameron Bay. The first building where Meikle based his office was a small cabin belonging to C.C. Macklin (Block 2, Lot 4). This building was unsuitable for a permanent government office, and in April 1934 Meikle began the search for a larger premise. There were few contractors then available to construct a new building so the best solution at the time was purchasing something ready for occupancy.

In August 1934, the Government finalized the purchase of Steve Yanik's residence then under construction. It was a two-storey log building (Block 1, Lot 18). Meikle brought his family to live with him at Cameron Bay, necessitating an addition to the former Yanik house, together with quarters for Paul Trudell, assistant mining recorder, who also moved to Cameron Bay. With the arrival of records from Fort Smith, the office and residence were ready for occupancy in October 1934. <sup>66</sup>

### ~ The Sawmills ~

Regulating timber resources and issuing harvesting permits was another duty of government agents. In 1933, Mackay Meikle investigated the timber of the district and identified the southern shores of Great Bear Lake to be most suitable in tree growth. Persons with interest in harvesting timber for commercial purposes had to apply with him (or in his absence the RCMP) for timber berths. The land around Cameron Bay was off limits for two reasons: first, the timber quality was poor, and second, the Quartz Mining Regulations gave exclusive timber rights to the owners of mineral claims. The shores of Echo Bay were blanketed with claims and permission to harvest from owners was not always possible.

Several sawmills operated in the Great Bear Lake-Echo Bay region during the period 1933-1935. The mills provided seasoned lumber, building materials, and cordwood for Cameron Bay and regional mining projects. The following were the major sawmill operators:

1) Eldorado Gold Mines Limited – The company produced lumber and cordwood for construction and heating at its Eldorado Mine. They applied for a permit to operate a sawmill berth #11 at Failes Bay near Lindsley Bay in April 1934. 25,211 f.m. of lumber was manufactured between April 1934 and September 1935, together with 267 cords of firewood. <sup>67</sup>

2) Murphy Services Limited – Within the large portfolio that Murphy Services held was a lumber business. It operated a sawmill on McVicar Arm over the winter of 1933-1934. Tom Payne was part of the crew that moved the sawmill outfit up the Bear River in the fall of 1933 and he regaled stories of the crew's unfortunate winter. Murphy Services went bankrupt in 1934 and the assets were seized. <sup>68</sup> The mill was later acquired by the Cinnamon Brothers.

3) Great Bear Lake Lumber Company – This group was incorporated in July 1933 with a private placement of 500 shares, based at Cameron Bay, NWT. <sup>69</sup> It was owned by J.G. Hebden and operated a sawmill directly within the settlement of Cameron Bay (Block 1, Lots 15-16) in the summer of 1933. It was a very small unit, powered by a 25-horsepower Kermath engine, capable of turning out 1500 feet of rough lumber. That material was principally used for flooring and roofing as people preferred to build cabins with hewn logs. <sup>70</sup>

Hebden had acquired a timber permit at Grouard Lake on the Camsell River draining into the south end of McTavish Arm in 1933. In July 1933 he applied for a sawmill site on Conjuror Bay, where the Camsell River enters Great Bear Lake. Delays did not allow for the arrival of Hebden's second sawmill that summer and so he only operated the Cameron Bay mill. In June 1934, the Cameron Bay sawmill was dismantled and moved to Conjuror Bay where Hebden had secured a one-year lease from the government to operate. This would have been a prime location for supplying the new White Eagle Silver Mines Limited operations on Camsell River a short distance away. Sawmilling began on June 13, 1934, with logs floated down the Camsell River from Grouard Lake. There are no details as to how much lumber Hebden manufactured at Conjuror Bay. It appears he only operated for the one season, and in 1935 the government reported he no longer required the mill site.<sup>71</sup>



**Ruins of Cinnamon's sawmill engine at Sawmill Bay in 2008. (INAC photo)**

4) Cinnamon Brothers – Ted and Glen Cinnamon came to Great Bear Lake to join the ranks of timbermen cutting wood for the camps. Elder brother Ted arrived in the fall of 1933, and Glen arrived months later in March 1934 to join his brother whipsawing lumber at the Hottah Lake camp. They charged \$75 per thousand board feet, and at a rate of 190 board feet per day they are said to have held a sawing record in the region. After successfully cutting 1000 cords of wood for the Eldorado Mine in the Echo Bay area<sup>72</sup>, the Cinnamon brothers decided to buy a sawmill and go into business for themselves.

In spring 1935, Cinnamon purchased a sawmill at McVicar Arm (formerly Murphy Services). It was operated by a massive steam-driven traction engine, which also provided the motor power necessary to move the entire outfit across the ice from the foot of McVicar Arm to Sawmill Bay, a 130 mile move, and much closer to the mining operations near Echo Bay. The price for cordwood in eight foot lengths averaged about \$6 per cord, and whipsawed lumber was \$75 per thousand feet. Activity had died down significantly in 1936 and by the following year the Cinnamon brothers had moved their wood cutting business to Yellowknife.<sup>73</sup>



## ~ The Growth of Cameron Bay ~

The overwintering of seven families at Cameron Bay during 1932-1933 heralded a townsite of permanence. These families included Mr. and Mrs. Joe Gerhard, Harry & Edna Reed, Vic & Florence Ingraham (they brought the first children into the district), Wilfred McDougall and his wife, Martin & Alix Bode, Henry Swanson and his daughter, and Tony Onraet and his sister Marie. <sup>74</sup> Mrs. Joe Gerhard was the first white woman to arrive. Frederick Watt was there to see her step off the boat in August 1932:

As two slim-beamed scows drew into the beach there was little opportunity to recognize the initial arrival of the fair sex. Mrs. Gerhart was clad in overalls, her face and arms were deeply tanned and she appeared to have the wiry frame of a finely-trained male athlete. The latter was not to be surprised at. Behind her lay between two and three thousand miles of arduous, daring water travel – a trip such as many men would have thought twice about before tackling. <sup>75</sup>

Joe Gerhard was very handy with an axe. He secured timber berths and supplied logs to those building cabins. Their cabin was one of the finest homes (Block 1, Lot 23). Watt described it as “spotless as a battleship’s quarterdeck...the intriguing aroma of fresh-baked bread pervaded it. There were pretty curtains on the windows and one of the scows had been dismantled to provide the planks for the floor.” Darcy Arden (senior) would later live in this cabin with his large Metis family.



**Joe and Ma Gerhard.**  
(**Canadian Home Journal,**  
**February 1934)**

During Cameron’s Bay first summer, the most substantial structure was Murphy Services’ log cabin, surrounded by numerous tent frames. A visitor returning in 1933 barely recognized the shore, now covered with up to 25 log cabins and several families. It boasted an RCMP post, a small two-building Hudson’s Bay Company compound, Royal Canadian Corp of Signals wireless radio station, doctor’s hut operated by Dr. Thomas Byrnes, government office, a small Catholic mission served by Father Alfred Gathy, two hotels, two restaurants, a general store, sawmill, Canadian Airways office, post office, and private camps. Businesses included Martin Gardner, who operated the ‘Gardner Café’; Harry Reed’s ‘Lakeshore Inn’; Vic Ingraham’s ‘Muskox Saloon’; and Henry Swanson’s trading post. In April 1933, there were 20 buildings, including three stores and four more log buildings under construction, with population of 120. <sup>76</sup>

Cameron Bay was a congenial community. It had a transient population but most of the businessmen and women stayed for years. The business community was the centre of daily life, as they plied their trades and services to the men and women living on the lake.

Gaming and recreation halls existed but illegal gambling was discouraged and the RCMP kept firm control on that type of partying. Liquor restrictions imposed on the NWT during this period and alcohol was rationed to white people once a year, usually coinciding with the summer picnic holidays. Regular dances were held to amuse the district's few women.

Harry and Edna Reed, from Spokane Washington, started up probably the second commercial venture at Cameron Bay in the summer of 1932. It was known as the 'Lakeshore Inn' and it occupied a number of lots (Block 2, Lots 10-13) at the northern end of the settlement. The Lakeshore Inn included one large log cabin used as a restaurant and recreation hall, and several smaller log cabins for bunkhouse accommodation.

Edna "Bunny" Reed was the second white woman at Cameron Bay. Edna was young and "filled with vivacious friendliness" as hostess of the premise. She did most of the cooking until business got so hectic that they hired a fulltime cook. Meals were \$1.50 each, and a cup of coffee 25 cents in 1934. Ham and cheese sandwiches were 75 cents. The prices of course represented the high cost of freighting supplies to Great Bear Lake, but were considered reasonable for the district. It cost one cent per pound to freight supplies there. The Reeds grew their own vegetables when possible considering the very short gardening season. They also brought the first livestock animals: two pigs sustained by table scraps.<sup>77</sup>

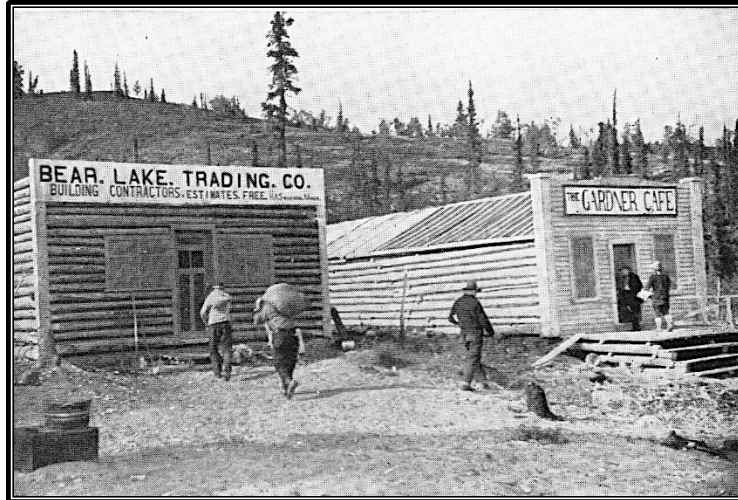


**Edna Reed, second white woman in the community. ("Great Bear Lake Is Calling You" brochure, 1933)**

Henry Swanson operated both a trading post and construction contractor business at Cameron Bay (Block 1, Lot 2). He arrived in late 1932 or early 1933. His main premise was a 20 x 20-ft log cabin above which hung a sign reading: "BEAR LAKE TRADING CO. – building contractors + estimates free, H.A. Swanson, mgr."<sup>78</sup> As the only construction contractor in the settlement, Swanson built many of the structures at Cameron Bay and also built barges and scows for use on the lake.<sup>79</sup> He lived in Cameron Bay with his daughter Anne. In 1934, Anne worked as a stenographer for the mines and was preparing to marry the local radio operator, George Svenson.<sup>80</sup>

Martin Gardner operated a cafe (Block 1, Lot 1 and Block 4 Lot 1) adjacent to Swanson's store. A photograph shows a long log building with a contrasting elegant wood-frame and pillared false front. "Old Man" Gardner was a renowned bootlegger selling moonshine at \$2 a cup. He was still in business by the summer of 1938, when traveler P.G. Downes visited Cameron Bay and stayed at Gardner's place. By this time the building had been enlarged, and the sign above the door now read "Gardner Hotel".<sup>81</sup>





**Swanson's trading post and Gardner's café, 1933.  
(The Sphere Magazine, September 1, 1934)**

The Hudson's Bay Company, the patriarchal traders of northern Canada, would not be left out of the action, and in June 1933 Andy Reid left Edmonton bound for Great Bear Lake to open up a trading post on Cameron Bay (Block 1, Lots 19-21). It was christened *Fort Dease*, in honor of an early HBC explorer on Great Bear. The post consisted of a main store with residence and a small warehouse, of standard Company white-washed siding and red-shingled hip-roof design.<sup>82</sup> Managers of the trading post were Andy Reid (1933-1938), George West (1938-1940) and John M. Ross (1940-1941). Some of the assistant clerks included Thomas W. Fraser (1934-1936) and Jack Kerr (1936-1938).<sup>83</sup>

The arrival of the doctor and the postal service would have been looked upon as the makings of a serious town. The inauguration of postal service to a community is a great matter of pride, and so it was when in 1932 Great Bear Lake became an official Government of Canada postal destination. Cameron Bay was chosen to be the site of the post office, thanks to the efforts of Murphy Services Limited to act upon as postal agents early in the camps existence. Gerry Murphy was appointed postmaster in December 1932 and served until his resignation in September 1934. Victor Ingraham then served from December 1934 to March 1937 when he resigned and left for Yellowknife. He was assisted by his step-brother, Willy Wylie.

According to postal records, the location of this post office was on Block 1, Lot 8 property of Murphy Services although other records suggest that the Murphy Services post office was on Block 1, Lot 9. In any case, with the resignation of Ingraham, Marcel Giroux, agent for Mackenzie Air Service, became postmaster (Block 1, Lot 4) a position he served into 1938. The postal designation was originally 'Great Bear Lake' starting in December 1932, being renamed 'Cameron Bay' in May 1933 and 'Port Radium' in November 1937.

While there were rumours that the Roman Catholic Church was planning to build a hospital, this never did happen, and for two years private practice doctor Thomas O. Byrnes was the region's only source of medical aid. He arrived in the spring of 1933 and

operated from a small premise (Block 4, Lot 4) that sat on the ridge behind the HBC post commanding a spectacular view of Echo Bay. It was sometimes called a hospital in the media yet more accurately described as a first aid station. With his wife as assistant, Dr. Byrnes was able to cope with cases of minor injuries as well as the occasional serious accident, but they lacked significant medical equipment. The doctor received \$200 per year for his services as Medical Health Officer for the area.<sup>84</sup>



**Mrs and Doctor Byrnes, 1934.  
(National Archives of Canada)**

When Vic Ingraham was received in Cameron Bay with his severe frostbite and other injuries in 1933, Dr. Byrnes had no choice but to make him comfortable and hope that he survived the plane ride to the nearest hospital in Aklavik. Byrnes struggled to maintain medical necessities and the community was incredibly fortunate that multiple casualties never taxed his inadequate facilities. He made weekly trips to the outlying mining camps by motor boat in summer or dog team in the winter. There were 200 to 300 people in his care and Dr. Byrnes received some remuneration from government.<sup>85</sup>

The doctor was originally stationed at Cameron Bay, but as operations intensified at the Eldorado Mine and fizzled everywhere else, arrangements were made to relocate Dr. Byrnes there during 1935.<sup>86</sup> He left for Lake Athabasca in northern Saskatchewan in July 1935, where a new gold rush was developing. In 1935-1937 the doctor stationed at Eldorado Mine was Maurice J. Thomson. He was followed by Dr. Percy J. Losier (1938-1939), Dr. Alexander MacPhee (1940), and Dr. James H. Macdonald (1942-1943).

The total population of Cameron Bay is not documented with any certainty. It would have been a very transient camp depending on the season, with few permanent residents. In 1934, there were over 350 residents in the district at the three radium/silver mines and within Cameron Bay itself. The town relied on prospecting activity, which peaked during the summer months, and business from the local mines.

### **~ What They Ate and What They Drank ~**

In 1935, Cameron Bay comprised a doctor's residence, mining recorder office, radio station, three stores, RCMP, hotel, and post office. There was a dance hall with gramophone, two pool tables and a snooker table, operated by Pete Racine (Block 4, Lot 5).<sup>87</sup> Racine was a renowned bootlegger and kept his mash fermenting under the bed. Henry Swanson, while not a documented bootlegger, also cooked up his own moonshine in a heated shed guarded by two ornery husky dogs. The quality of these creations was questionable but lack of options rang true the saying "beggars can't be choosers".<sup>88</sup>

Liquor regulations in the NWT at the time were very stringent. There were no taverns in which a person could sit down and imbibe. There were no licensed liquor stores to shop at. The importation and consumption of spirits were heavily regulated to limit

availability to Indigenous people and white trappers who might over-indulge and be left in precarious, destitute situations. Liquor was bad business to the dominant fur trade and discouraged by the church missions – the two prominent institutions essentially governing society in the north. The arrival of so many white miners and prospectors in the 1930s forced a relaxation of liquor rules. Permits for the possession of liquor became available with the RCMP acting as agents for distribution. Liquor was allotted under the premise of “medicinal needs” with two gallons rationed out under permit per person, per year. Under these limitations, bootlegging thrived. Few followed the rules and even the police were reluctant to enforce the law in places so distant from where politicians had signed them.

Equally lax on enforcement were the wildlife hunting regulations. Caribou became the staple diet in the north. Caribou meat sourced from Dene hunters came at a hefty price of 15 cents per pound. Prospectors lobbied government to make it legal to hunt for their own caribou but government refused to change policy aimed at conservation of the species and protection of Dene hunting rights.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, as the law was impossible to enforce, it was common for the settlers to harvest caribou. According to one newspaper report, miners shot more than 450 caribou and packed the meat in ice for the summer.<sup>90</sup>

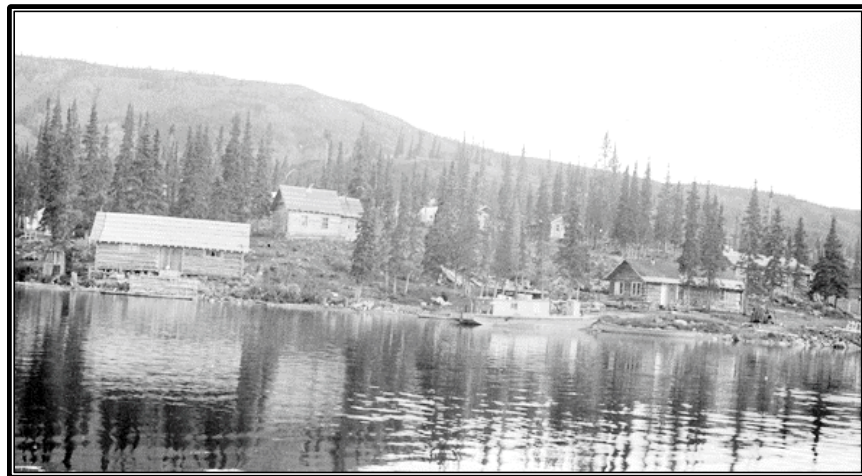
Fred Peet, who worked at Eldorado Mine in 1935-1936, described the camp food as “deplorable”. Jim St. Marie was chef at the mine in 1934-1936. Fresh meat was the preferred cuisine and plentiful at that – caribou, moose, duck and fish, supplemented with the desiccated dried vegetables, evaporated fruits, and smoked hams and bacons, all imported in tin cans from Edmonton. His kitchen was fueled entirely by wood which cost \$20 per cord.<sup>91</sup>

It didn’t take long for the settlers to comment on the high cost of living at Great Bear Lake. An *Edmonton Bulletin* article from September 1932 listed the following prices: cigar, 25 cents; sugar, 60 cents per pound; flour, \$35 per sack; gasoline, \$3.50. Cooked meals by the plate were \$2, which may not seem like a lot by modern comparison but consider that men were only making \$7.50 per day.<sup>92</sup>

Work at the mines was hard, and camp life offered few amenities. Eldorado’s accommodations in the 1930s were log cabin structures with outdoor privies. The first wood-framed bunkhouse with steam heat and running water was not erected until 1936. Yet a visiting female correspondent with the *Edmonton Journal* to the mine workings in August 1934 found the men’s quarters “models of neatness”. Forty-six miners, unmarried men in their twenties, were housed in the ram-pasture bunkhouse, each with an eiderdown bedroll, wool blanket, and pillow made from a flour sack. Belongings were kept in a trunk or in rough shelving made from discarded wood crates. Bridge, cribbage, poker and outdoor sports were the chief ways of passing the time. There was no company store, no way to spend money. A miner at Eldorado would have to find passage by water or dog team to Cameron Bay settlement 10 kilometers away. Only here could he find an outlet for recreation or splurging on goods, but most men exercised incredible restraint and focused on their jobs earning considerable credit.<sup>93</sup>



**Cameron Bay waterfront views showing from left to right: Gerhard’s cabin, Hudson’s Bay Company store and warehouse, Yanik’s house (later government offices), and sawmill. (NWT Archives/N-2002-002:0170)**



**Cameron Bay waterfront views showing from left to right: Murphy Services Ltd warehouse, residence, restaurant, and post office behind trees on right. (NWT Archives/N-2002-002:0153)**

### **~ The Annual Summer Picnic ~**

Community spirit was born on August 4, 1932 with the holding of a great picnic celebration. At that date, practically the entire Great Bear Lake mining field gathered at Cameron Bay for food and games. It was an opportunity for the year’s ration of ‘medicinal liquor’, fresh off the barges, to be ceremoniously consumed by the community. Journalist Courtney Ryley Cooper described the behavior that followed: “There were two cases of Scotch and a case of gin, resulting in seven prospectors falling into the chilling waters of Great Bear, at its warmest only thirty-seven degrees above zero, and one outdoing all previous accomplishments by jumping into a bonfire.”<sup>94</sup> Gerry Murphy, Vic Ingraham, and John Michaels, Edmonton businessman and major sponsors of the event, stood up most of the evening to serve the refreshments, and pilot Punch Dickins presided over the award ceremony for competitions in canoe racing, tug of

war, and fishing. An NWT Prospectors Association, the first group of its kind in the north, was formed to promote and represent mining and exploration interests in the camp.

The picnic was held as an annual event and grew each time. A brochure was produced and widely distributed in southern Canada to capture the attention of tourists in time for the 1933 picnic: “For those contemplating taking this trip, a genuine thrill is promised. You forget your sophistication and enter into the spirit of the affair like you did in your boyhood days. These men make their own fun, and fun it is”. The excursion from Edmonton to Great Bear Lake and back, with stopovers in various communities, was advertised at a price of \$390 for a ten-day adventure. The package included a day of fishing, tours of the mining works of Eldorado and Contact Lake, and fun and games at Cameron Bay. “The trip will offer a threefold attraction – a flight across the last, great North of Canada, an insight into the potentialities and actualities of the remarkable mining field, and an opportunity to take part in one of the most colourful events on the Canadian social calendar.”<sup>95</sup>



**A crowd gathers during summer picnic 1934. The cabin is the NWT Prospectors Association hall. (Glenbow Archives/PA-2218-91)**

Over 300 people attended the 1933 summer picnic, with events spanning over four days. Guests from Edmonton included Judge Farrell, Reverend Clarke, and a contingent of businessmen the likes of grain tycoon John Gillespie, merchant John Michaels, Walter Hale postal inspector, and Alex Stewart, with over \$1000 in prizes donated. The famous bush pilots were the couriers of the guests, represented by Con Farrell, Wop May, Punch Dickins, Walter Gilbert, John Bythell, Archie McMullen, Leigh Brintnell, and Matt Berry. Fishing expeditions to the Coppermine River were arranged for the richest of the tourists. A tug of war was held between a team from the Bear Exploration and Radium company and the miners at the Camsell River silver strike. The Camsell River team won, not by physical strength, but by the luck of the draw as the match had ended with stalemate and the victor decided by coin toss.<sup>96</sup>

1934’s picnic was the greatest and appeared to solidify the mining camp. A type of adhoc council was struck to organize the event (the highest level of democratic

government that Cameron Bay attained), with representatives from the different mining camps delegated to various tasks. Fred Peet was selected on behalf of the White Eagle Mines camp to run the bar:

To avoid a repetition of the previous year's drunken shemozzle, the executive decided a bar would be set up in a vacant building and free liquor would be dispensed through one of the windows. In this way we would be able to control the degree of drunkenness of those who could not control it themselves.

Everything went well until Fraser and I were required to participate on our respective tug-of-war teams around 4 p.m. We arrived back at the bar about 5:30 p.m. to find McDonell as drunk as a hoot owl and handing out liquor in cupsful. The door to the building was unlocked and open. Several residents were staggering around with bottles of liquor in their pockets. What had started out as a moderate sober day had turned into another drunken debacle. <sup>97</sup>

Vic Ingraham was presented an award for his bravery of survival in the *Speed II* disaster, and a ball game was held between employees of Consolidated Mining & Smelting and Cameron Bay residents. Eldorado donated a solid silver ball weighing 16 pounds for shot-put competitions, and several other games with prizes were offered. Other notable events included the formation of an Empire Service League for members at Great Bear Lake (composed of those who had military service for the Dominion during the First World War), and a tour of the Eldorado Mine for distinguished guests of the area, including Lord Duncannon son of the Governor-General of Canada (The Earl of Bessborough), and several government dignitaries. <sup>98</sup>

Traditions are tough to break, and the 1935 picnic went ahead although it was a scaled back, perhaps sombre affair. Eldorado's camp dairy wrote on August 3, 1935: "Most of the men over at Cameron for the annual picnics", following up the next day with: "Several men, however, not yet back. In some cases the day was spent in sober reflection. Picnic said to be less successful than those of other years." <sup>99</sup>

### ~ Other Characters of Note ~

Tony Onraet was a French-Canadian man who came north by canoe in 1932. With Colin Campbell he built a cabin at the end of Bay 66 and hunted caribou over his first winter. He ran several traplines during his many years in the Great Bear Lake region, including one up the Johnny Hoe River near Blackwater Lake. He loved dogs and wrote about the team's many escapades. His sister, Mary Onraet, worked at Harry & Edna Reed's "Lakeshore Inn" as their sole employee in 1933. Eventually, with Tony as partner, she secured a vacated log cabin and started the "Radium Café". <sup>100</sup>

The radium rush attracted Yukon pioneers hoping to re-kindled a "Klondike" atmosphere. "Yukon Jess" and Frank Cousineau were two of these characters. Cousineau

had been a noted gold rush gambler in 1898 and eventually grew disillusioned with the modern camp. Yukon Jess, too, had idealistic dreams of what Cameron Bay had to offer. One visitor described her as a lady of “immense girth” who did the town’s laundry.<sup>101</sup> Fred Peet believed that she had been coaxed to come north by Martin Gardiner to open a brothel, picking up two glamour girls enroute from Edmonton. But this was no Dawson’s City. Romantic names like “Eldorado” and “El-Bonanza” betrayed images of gold nuggets panned directly from placer streams. Yukon Jess left defeated:

A free-trading miner, one evening, tried to convince Jess the rock was worth \$30,000 per gram when refined and wanted to trade a packsack full of the stuff for feminine favours. She took one look at the non-glittering junk and told him to go and get lost. Before long these three enterprising women knew their business, like so many others, could not succeed in this poverty stricken area.<sup>102</sup>

Alfred Gathy, the famous Catholic Oblate priest, first visited the camp in the summer of 1932 from his mission at Fort Norman (now Tulita). While Cameron Bay the community was a new entity, Gathy was familiar with the territory since Great Bear Lake was part of his “parish” and he knew many of the settlers and practically all of the Dene. His bush skills were legendary. He could drive a dog team, paddle a canoe, or build a log cabin like any trapper or prospector. The priest was also a magician and a notorious poker player. Gathy fit in well with the miners and built a small log mission (either Block 1 Lot 30 or Block 4 Lot 17) and would frequently return to Cameron Bay over the years.<sup>103</sup>

Thomas Payne worked his way to Great Bear Lake in 1933 as a mechanic on the *Liard River* and other tug boats, finding steady work helping run barges up and down the swift Bear River and then operating Murphy’s sawmill at McVicar Arm. That winter the sawmill crew suffered misfortune after misfortune, losing their food stock to fire and their only fishing net to the depths of the lake. They soon tired of snaring rabbits and drove their tractor across Great Bear Lake, perhaps the only ones to ever attempt such a journey. Miles of wide pressure ridges blocked their path and it took many days to safely traverse the most prominent ridge. Ten days of -60 degree conditions and 300 miles later they came within sight of Echo Bay and lit a huge fire to attract a rescue. Payne was in bad shape after that adventure: “It took a month for my face to get back to normal. My left cheek was a solid mass of scab and whiskers an inch thick. All the sticky juice had run out of my frozen, blistered face. What a mess.” Tom Payne later became a famous gold prospector because of his discoveries at Yellowknife.<sup>104</sup>

The Byrne family of mining engineers also got their start at Great Bear Lake (no relation to Dr. Thomas Byrnes). J.J. Byrne was a mining magnate with a record of establishing silver mines in Ontario, Cobalt. Byrne allied closely with Charles Sloan, one of the first prospectors around Great Bear, and even christened his motorboat in Sloan’s honour. Through this partnership Byrne was able to secure land adjoining the Eldorado Mine, forming Great Bear Lake Mines Limited to work the claims. Byrne’s two sons were brought north, Jerry and Norman, and a shaft was sunk on a silver vein. It went

down 100 feet where the silver pinched out. The Byrne's never lost faith in the north; they went to Yellowknife and started important gold, tungsten and uranium mines. <sup>105</sup>

Harry Hayter was instrumental in the search and rescue for Vic Ingraham after the *Speed II* disaster in October 1933 and recounted the epic rescue story to his friend Jack Moar, which was later published in *The Beaver* magazine and others. When Harry Hayter first came to Great Bear Lake he was a partner in Airportation Limited but eventually joined Leigh Brintnell's Mackenzie Air Service organization. His little plane, a red Curtiss-Robin C-1 with registration CF-AHE, was like the camp taxi. Hayter, with his wife, was one of the few bush pilots living year-round at Cameron Bay. Hayter liked to entertain visiting delegates and tourists, flying up fishing and hunting parties to Great Bear Lake or the Coppermine River. <sup>106</sup>

Arthur Bird and Archie White were trapping and prospecting partners for many years, until built-up animosity finally split them apart. The partnership dissolved and all of their supplies were divided into two. Even the boat was sawn in half! They went their separate ways, Archie White up the Johnny Hoe River, and Arthur Bird to set up camp on the McVicar Arm of Great Bear Lake. Bird grew despondent at his cabin, his journal entries lonely and forlorn; around New Years Day 1935, the dairy ends. An RCMP patrol in the spring came upon his empty cabin and judging by Arthur Bird's writing, they determined that he decided to walk 120 miles back to Cameron Bay. They discovered old tracks leading to a lake fissure, and then nothing. Years later, Archie White committed suicide and was eaten by his dogs. <sup>107</sup>

There were no documented murders, and most deaths were suicides, accidents, or drownings. Scattered grave sites at Echo Bay and one rogue grave marker at Cameron Bay hints to the tragedies that befell people. The sad duty of the RCMP officers often involved investigating grim accidents. Some of the incidents in the Port Radium/Cameron Bay area were as follows.

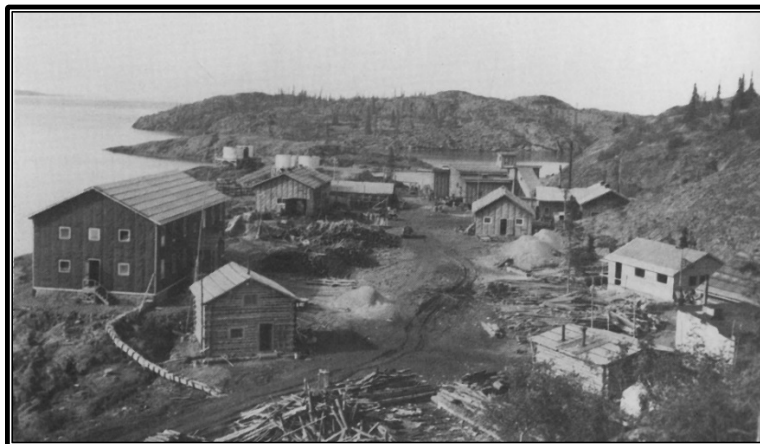
- Harry Dalton, drowned on White Eagle River August 1933. <sup>108</sup>
- Destruction of the Royal Canadian Corp of Signals radio station by fire in September 1933. <sup>109</sup>
- Edward H. Henderson, drowned on White Eagle River October 1933. <sup>110</sup>
- The tragedy of the *Speed II* boat in the middle of Great Bear Lake October 1933 in which Harry Jebb and Jimmy Potts were killed and Vic Ingraham badly burned.
- Unidentified man at Camsell River who fell down the White Eagle Mines shaft and was badly injured in June 1934. Medevac'd to Fort Smith and then Edmonton hospital. <sup>111</sup>
- Theople Lamoureux, drowned in Cameron Bay, August 1934. <sup>112</sup>
- Arthur Bird, vanished from his isolated trappers cabin on McVicar Arm, Great Bear Lake, 1935. <sup>113</sup>
- Joseph Camillieus Tailleur, a 35 year old prospector found dead on a trail at Leith Point in the summer of 1935. <sup>114</sup>
- Mr. Marshall, died of heart trouble at Cameron Bay in September 1935. <sup>115</sup>



- John Alexander Ingraham, 10-month old son of Vic Ingraham, died at Cameron Bay in December 1935. Body sent to Edmonton for burial. <sup>116</sup>
- Otto Mason Torrington, killed in accidental gun discharge at his cabin four-miles from Cameron Bay, January 1936. <sup>117</sup>
- Destruction yet again of the Royal Canadian Corp of Signals warehouse and powerplant by fire in April 1936. <sup>118</sup>
- George Taylor, killed in bulldozer accident at Contact Lake mine, March 1937. Body sent to Edmonton. <sup>119</sup>
- Joseph Anger, drowned falling off an RCMP boat near Cameron Bay, August 1937. <sup>120</sup>
- Carl Gosch, killed in mining accident at Eldorado Mine, August 1938. Body sent to Edmonton. <sup>121</sup>
- Victor Malmi, burned to death in bunkhouse fire Eldorado Mine, March 1943. <sup>122</sup>
- John Albert Tanner, drowned when tractor went through ice at Eldorado Mine, April 1946. <sup>123</sup>

### ~ The Regional Mines ~

Eldorado was the largest mine in the Echo Bay area and the most important, as it was the only producer of radium minerals. It was owned by Eldorado Gold Mines Limited, with Gilbert and Charles Labine as executive officers in charge of company operations. Emil Walli was mine manager from 1933 to 1940. At the height of operations, there were 100 employees with no families, except the wife of Mr. Walli, living in the camp.

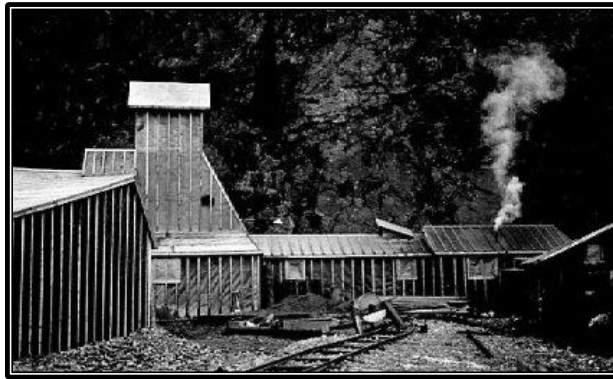


**Eldorado Mine in August 1937. (National Archives/PA-014821)**

Commercial production at Eldorado was achieved in 1933 with the completion of the gravity mill and shipment of first copper/silver/radium concentrates to the company's refinery in Port Hope, Ontario. The mine was accessed from a portal on the side of the hill, and in 1934 a shaft was sunk below the first level, deepened to 580-feet in 1936. A second shaft, known as the #2 or "Gulch", was started in 1935 and completed in 1938 east of the main workings, but it was exploratory in nature and never part of commercial operations. The mine closed in 1940 as sales of radium dwindled.

Eldorado reopened in 1942 to focus on its uranium minerals, now important for military applications. Eldorado was taken over by the Canadian government in 1944 and was rebranded as Eldorado Mining & Refining Limited. The mine modernized with expanded mill and camp facilities, and the shaft was deepened to 1400-feet. Eldorado developed a new shaft at Crossfault Lake in 1945-1947 and some development ore sent to the mill. Eldorado cleared an airstrip at Sawmill Bay to improve year-round transportation to the area. In 1954, the mine employed 270 people and there were many married couples and families living in the camp. The settlement was officially known as “Port Radium”. The Eldorado Mine closed in 1960 with depletion of uranium ores. <sup>124</sup>

Echo Bay Mines Limited would reopen the mill and camp between 1964 and 1982 to produce silver and copper from the adjacent Echo Bay claims and also the remnant silver and copper ores left in the underground stopes of Eldorado Mine.



**Bear Exploration and Radium silver mine at Contact Lake.  
(NWT Archives/N-1999-015:0048)**

The second largest mine in the district was the Contact Lake Mine, located on the north shore of Contact Lake. It was staked in 1931 by Northern Aerial Minerals Limited and was brought to silver production in 1933 by Bear Exploration and Radium Limited. It was an underground mine accessed by portal on the side of a hill; three levels were opened by internal winze. The gravity mill was a small 25 ton per day unit, powered by steam boiler and diesel engine. A small crew was housed in a log cabin camp on the shore of Contact Lake. In the final year of operations before the war, the company focused on recovering uranium minerals from the ore with mixed success. The mine closed in 1939 although it reopened for exploration and development several times in the 1940s, 1960s, and 1970s.

El-Bonanza Mine was an underground silver exploration project that did not reach commercial production. The original ‘Bonanza’ and ‘St Paul’ claims had been staked by Gilbert Labine’s interests and were turned over to El-Bonanza Mining Corporation Limited in 1934. This group explored the claims between 1934 and 1935 with a shaft and portal tunnel. A road was pushed to Bonanza Bay on Great Bear Lake. It was a high-grade silver deposit but did not prove economic. A.W. Scott was manager of the El-Bonanza operation.

The Bonanza Mine was the portion of the 'Bonanza' claims that Gilbert Labine and Eldorado Gold Mines Limited retained and didn't sell to El-Bonanza Mining Corporation. Eldorado sank a 100-foot shaft on the silver vein in 1937-1938 but silver grades were not encouraging.

Echo Bay Mine was owned by Consolidated Mining & Smelting Limited, one of the first to stake in response to Gilbert Labine's discovery. The 'Echo Bay' claims were secured in 1930 to the east of Eldorado Mine. This was a silver and copper deposit with no uranium ever proven. Underground development between 1934-1936 through two portal levels revealed an important resource. It did not become a commercially viable operation however until 1964 when Echo Bay Mines Limited was formed to begin production. The Echo Bay Mine ran between 1964 and 1982 using the old Eldorado Mine as a base of operations.

The White Eagle Mine was located on the Camsell River, 54 kilometers south of Echo Bay. The 'Otter' and 'Elite' claims were staked in 1932 by the A.X. Syndicate. White Eagle Silver Mines Limited explored the property in 1933-1935 via tunneling. A large log camp was built and a Royal Canadian Corp of Signals wireless radio station was established. Len Smith was the manager in charge of 24 men. The silver veins would not prove economic until the 1970s when Federated Mining Corporation, and later Northrim Mines Limited, started commercial production.

Hottah Lake Mines Limited and Great Bear Developments Limited explored the 'Tatee' and 'Bee' claims on Beaverlodge Lake, 100 kilometers south of Echo Bay in 1934 with a short shaft. Pitchblende ores were the target. Three frame buildings constituted the camp. This was the property that Darcy Arden staked.

Contact Lake Mining Company conducted tunneling on the 'VIE' claims on the east end of Contact Lake in the summer of 1933 exploring for silver and copper. Seven men were employed but the work was unsubstantial.

Great Bear Lake Mines Limited, owned by J.J. Byrne, explored the 'RAD' claims in 1932-1934 south of Eldorado Mine from a camp on the north side of Glacier Bay. A shaft was put down 115 feet to examine silver mineralization but nothing economic was found.

Great Bear Development Company Limited owned the 'Bud' claims at Sparkplug Lake in 1932-1934 and built a large log cabin camp to oversee exploration. No economic mineral deposits were outlined despite 17 holes drilled and significant trenching.

On Mystery Island, there was apparently a small adit driven on a pitchblende zone in 1933. There is little information available about this mine.

### **~ The Departure of the Mining Recorder ~**

Mining activity in the winter of 1934/1935 was concentrated at the Eldorado, Contact Lake, Echo Bay, El-Bonanza, and White Eagle silver properties, where significant

underground work was underway. Mackay Meikle was a busy man. It was the mining inspector's job to inspect and report on the activities of these companies to the satisfaction of the Quartz Mining Regulations. It was also his duty, as a family man, to ensure the comfort of his wife and children. Little is written to inform us on how the Meikle family enjoyed their first winter at Cameron Bay but one can imagine it offered quite the change from the amenities of Fort Smith. Surely, Meikle was aware of conditions at Cameron Bay, and his superiors had warned about the risk of relocating his wife and children there. There were limited recreation opportunities, few other families to socialize with, only simple provisions to be found at the HBC trading post, and no school for the three children.

We learn from government correspondence that the winter of 1934/1935 was very cold and newspapers reported on the thermometer dropping to minus 73 degrees.<sup>125</sup> It turned out that the logs used in the addition to Meikle's office, completed just prior to winter freezeup, were very green. The logs did not have opportunity to dry, resulting in frost destruction of both logs and mortar. These conditions made the living quarters very uncomfortable and the only thing Meikle and assistant Paul Trudell could do to keep out the draft was to splash the exterior logs with water to freeze seal the walls.

For some months after the opening of the recording office, the staff was fairly busy issuing certificates of work. Many claims had been permitted to lapse, however, and the number of active mineral claims in the Great Bear Lake Mining District was reduced from 4000 to 1400 in 1935. Only 300 new claims had been registered at the office since September 1934, with limited revenue accrued. By early 1936, it was clear to the government that interest in Great Bear Lake was waning. Paul Trudell returned to Fort Smith in November 1935 and arrangements were made for the RCMP to act as sub-mining recorder agents in the event that Meikle was unavailable. But Meikle too was now thinking of leaving the district, dissatisfied as he was with living conditions at Cameron Bay, a town witnessing its final days. In early 1936 he requested a transfer back to Fort Smith.<sup>126</sup>

The timing seemed right for all concerned. The inspection work could be administered from Fort Smith and the office-work carried out by a sub-mining recorder, either based in Cameron Bay or relegated to the RCMP. Ultimately, it was the RCMP that accepted those duties which were fulfilled until the lights were finally turned off a few years later.

### **~ The Winter Carnival and Dog Races ~**

The first dog race in the NWT was something to remember, and Cameron Bay was at its centre. It was held against the background of flailing interest in the camp and a dwindling stock value for the Eldorado mining company itself. The Great Depression was ongoing and speculative money was scarce. In February 1937, Eldorado directors organized a media event to showcase its mining operations through film and festival, inviting shareholders and other dignitaries. "For a week or more, the area took on all the scenario of a three-ring circus" wrote Fred Peet. What started as company propaganda

became a true winter carnival attracting regional trappers, prospectors, and whoever else happened to be around. A dog mushing “fun race” was organized, and a dozen teams put forth their names. <sup>127</sup>

Contestants were required to race 14 miles around Echo Bay from Eldorado Mine to Cameron Bay, with a team of four or five dogs, hauling a 60-pound load of ore bags. Maurice Evans, representing the Bear Exploration and Radium mine at Contact Lake, won the race with his team of four dogs, with a time of one hour and 18 minutes. Sonny Arden got second place with a trailing lead of only one minute and a half behind Evans. Many of the novice dogs ran themselves off the track, became tangled in their harnesses, and started brawls. <sup>128</sup>



**The dog mushing trophy 1937, an oil drum with welded handles and coated with aluminum paint. (Yellowknife Historical Society)**

For the spectators it was all a great thrill. The prize for Maurice Evans was \$50 in cash, and bragging rights to hold a silver-painted 10-gallon oil drum, with welded handles. Sonny Arden took a \$25 prize and the other participants were handed bottles of whiskey as consolation and to help inject some warmth back into their bones. The whole group then retreated to Cameron Bay for a huge supper feast with more spirits provided by the mining companies. The race was held again in 1938 – Ned Fraser, an RCMP officer, won that competition. <sup>129</sup>

### **~ The End Comes ~**

With a dwindling of prospecting activity at Echo Bay the camp’s glory was coming to an end. News reports gave positive vibes when it described Cameron Bay in 1935 as thriving with a small group of pioneers who would not quit when the “fireworks are over”. <sup>130</sup> Yet concurrent with the typical boom and bust cycle of all mining camps, within three years Cameron Bay would almost be a ghost town.

The final years were a slow demise, fueled in large part by the waning interest of mineral activity in the Great Bear Lake area. Although the Eldorado, Contact Lake, and

El Bonanza mines were active, there were no new discoveries or projects under development. Significant gold finds at Goldfields on Lake Athabasca (northern Saskatchewan) and Yellowknife Bay on Great Slave Lake in 1935 and 1936 enticed prospectors, traders, and businessmen to relocate to new centers of action.

In August of 1937, the governor general of Canada, John Buchan, the Lord Tweedsmuir, flew into Great Bear Lake to end a 4000-mile summer tour of the Northwest Territories. He enjoyed a meal at Cameron Bay and toured the Eldorado Mine before spending the night in its guest cabin. At that time, Cameron Bay consisted of two log hotels, a store, a few cabins, the RCMP, and the postmaster. Tweedsmuir's visit was the highlight of an otherwise quiet summer for the fading town. <sup>131</sup>



**The “Radium Café” in its final months 1938.  
 (“North Again for Gold”)**

On November 1, 1937, the name of the community was officially changed from “Cameron Bay” to “Port Radium”. It had a nicer ring to it, and maybe the pioneer citizens hoped the new name would rejuvenate the romance of radium days gone by. Months previously, residents had lobbied for this name, but by the time it had moved through the bureaucracy to become official there were few left in town to celebrate. The pride of the community, Harry and Edna Reed’s “Lakeshore Inn”, had closed down for lack of business soon after the visit of Lord Tweedsmuir. <sup>132</sup> Tony & Mary Onraet’s “Radium Café” also closed its doors in 1937. Tony lamented in his memoirs:

There it was a first-class restaurant surrounded by thousands of square miles of wild, unpopulated country, and nobody any longer to sit down at the tables except the pilots of Canadian Airways, who stopped for fuel and a night’s rest on their way to and from the Arctic Coast with the month’s mail. Sometimes, I did not serve a meal or sell half a pound of tea in weeks! The boom town was well on the way to being a ghost town. <sup>133</sup>

Vic Ingraham, the postmaster, had resigned and moved to Yellowknife, where most of the denizens were now heading. Serious gold mining developments were under way on Great Slave Lake. It was a chance to start a new pioneer mining settlement. And it was all

happening to the detriment of Cameron Bay, the Northwest Territories original mining boomtown. On November 1, 1937 the name “Port Radium” really only meant something to the new postmaster, Marcel Giroux and to the boys of the Royal Canadian Corp of Signals and the RCMP who kept watch over the airwaves and lake waves respectively, at the bequest of the Government of Canada.

We get an impression of the demise through the eyes of the casual visitor to the settlement. Journalist Edgar Laytha visited in the spring of 1938. The “Lakeshore Café” buildings were empty and its abandoned financial papers blowing in the wind. The “Radium Café” was now owned by Norman and Dorothy Bailes but it was finally on its last legs, as the Bailes moved to Yellowknife shortly thereafter.<sup>134</sup> Another outside visitor, P.G. Downes, noted in his diary of August 17, 1938 a population of 16 people, describing it as a “ghost town, a relic of the radium rush”. Martin Gardner’s hotel and café was the last remaining evidence of commerce.<sup>135</sup>

Government agents Roy Gibson and A.L. Cumming made a district inspection and landed at “Port Radium/Cameron Bay” on August 6, observing a rapid depopulation. At that time, the RCMP and Royal Canadian Corp of Signals remained stationed here, some living in the former government offices. The RCMP, under Corporal Thomas Bolstad, was an underused sub-mining recorders office. It was not clear to Gibson and Cummings if the RCMP intended to keep their officers at Port Radium, or move them to Eldorado Mine. Marcel Giroux was still the postmaster as well as agent for Mackenzie Air Service Limited, one of the last signs of commerce in the settlement.<sup>136</sup>

Mining inspector Mackay Meikle visited the town while inspecting local mines in March 1939. He specifically reported on the condition of government buildings and wrote that the log office was in very good condition and might require some maintenance, hinting that the government still considered the building as an important asset (lest mining activity in the district be renewed). The RCCS, incidentally, were still occupying the living quarters section of the office building, putting to use an otherwise vacant facility. While they requested *full* use of the building for living quarters, Meikle preferred to retain the office section in case the RCMP wished to use the building for its intended purposes – a mining recorder’s office. Meikle recorded 16 residents at Port Radium, including five women. These included two RCMP officers, two RCCS operators, the Hudson’s Bay Company post manager, and the postmaster. Many of the old log cabins had been demolished for firewood or were otherwise vacant.<sup>137</sup>

During Meikle’s visit in 1939, the HBC post manager reported a profitable year even with the small amount of fur brought in. Principal fur caught in the region was marten, and while there were few prospectors the Dene were still living in the area and were bringing in a good trade. The HBC therefore planned to continue operating the post for the time being.

The closure of the Eldorado radium mine was the last straw. In June 1940, Eldorado Gold Mines Limited mothballed the mine when the market for radium in Europe disappeared. German troop movements in Belgium disrupted the marketing of radium



salts overseas, and Gilbert LaBine himself flew to Great Bear Lake to make arrangements for shutting the mine down. That very summer, the government offices, including RCMP and RCCS facilities, were shuttered. The Hudson's Bay Company also boarded up the windows and announced, in August 1941, a permanent withdrawal of trading from Great Bear Lake. Cameron Bay in that moment seemed to meet a definitive end. <sup>138</sup>

### ~ The Port Radium Era ~

In 1942, the Eldorado mining company reopened its workings at Great Bear Lake, with a focus on extracting uranium ores for the new war effort. When Mackay Meikle made an inspection trip through the region in September 1942, there was only one white trapper, Jack Raymond, and his Dene wife, living at the old Cameron Bay settlement. Most of the cabins were now more-or-less destroyed and uninhabitable. Meikle made sure the government buildings were secure and discussed with the Eldorado mine manager about their renewed mining activities and the possibility of having an RCMP detachment in the district once again. Both agreed it was appropriate to base a government agent at the Eldorado Mine itself where the RCMP could be responsible for site security. <sup>139</sup>



**Near abandoned buildings at Cameron Bay in the 1950s. The large house on the right was the former 1934-1936 government offices and was then being occupied by Edward Blondin and family. The Hudson's Bay company post remained intact. (NWT Archives/N-1992-254:0420)**

The Royal Canadian Corp of Signals too returned to the area, relocating its equipment to the Eldorado Mine, where all activity was now to be centered. And the name of the revived government service center? Port Radium! But it was a rechristening of an old name, geographically separated from the historic mining settlement formerly known as Cameron Bay, now practically an abandoned community. After 1942, when someone mentioned the name 'Port Radium', it was in connection to a great uranium mine and its company town, where you could find the RCMP constable, government telegraph office, postmaster, medical health officer, and commissary store. The original Port Radium was forgotten.



The Eldorado Mine at Port Radium would produce uranium ores from 1942 to 1960. A claim of notoriety comes from an alleged role in the atomic bomb that was dropped on Japan in 1945. While the ores that went into those early experiments unlikely came from Great Bear Lake (more likely imported from the Belgian Congo), the Eldorado company had a near monopoly on North American uranium production for many years and contributed to research and development of nuclear weapons and technology. The toxic legacy of mine pollution still haunts the old mine. Eldorado became a silver mining operation under Echo Bay Mines between 1964 and 1982 after which several attempts to remediate the site have tried to address legacy impacts on wildlife and people who visit the area. There is still much monitoring and work to be done.

And what happened to the forgotten village of Cameron Bay? To employees of the Eldorado Mine, it was always a curious haunt worthy of a weekend visit. After 1945 there were occasional reports of Dene families and prospectors occupying the village. On the May 1949 federal election voters list for “Port Radium NWT”, Edward Blondin, John & Mirose Baptiste, Pierre & Judy Paul, Joseph & Elizabeth Tavic, Jimmy Lacou, George Johnnie, and several members of the Modeste family (Francis, Isadore, Johnny, Madelain, Cecelia) are listed as residents of ‘Cameron Bay’ (they were also employed by Eldorado Mine). Eldorado often asked government’s permission to use its 1934 log cabin office for their prospecting parties. Edward Blondin and his family were living in the office in the 1950s with permission from Ottawa. The government eventually stopped maintaining its assets at Cameron Bay and eventually the old office collapsed or was demolished for its burnable wood.

A house belonging to Vic Ingraham was home to two prospectors in 1946. <sup>140</sup> Old log cabins formerly used by Harry and Edna Reed for the “Lakeshore Inn” were still standing but in a Henry Busse photograph they appear gutted, with windows punched out and snow-covered roofs sagging <sup>141</sup>. The HBC post buildings stayed in shape, but the signature canvas sign atop of the main post was soon shredded by the elements.

### ~ Branson’s Lodge ~

In 1963, when John and Jeannie Branson started up a fishing lodge on Cameron Bay, all that was left were the Hudson’s Bay buildings, the log cabin built by Joe Gerhard and later owned by Darcy Arden Sr., and the RCMP detachment. Branson’s Lodge signed a lease for practically all of the lots of the former Cameron Bay/Port Radium settlement in 1966. They renovated the old RCMP and HBC buildings into guest suites together with erecting all new lodging along the beach point.

Great Bear Lake offered world class trout fishing, and a stay at scenic Cameron Bay did not disappoint the American tourists. While the Branson family no longer own it (their company declared bankruptcy in 1990), and the main lodge complex burned down in 1998, the facility continued to provide visitor services as an outpost of Plummer’s Lodge on Great Bear Lake in the early 2000s. <sup>142</sup>

## ~ Cameron Bay in 2005 ~

In July 2005, when I visited the village, the old lodge facilities were being used by Alberta Star Development Corporation. This Vancouver grassroots exploration group was run by Tim Coupland, brother of famous Canadian author Douglas Coupland, and they had the rights to minerals claims throughout the Great Bear Lake area. A drilling program was underway near Contact Lake Mine and helicopters were conducting geophysical surveys of the region. They were hunting for Iron Oxide Copper Gold (IOCG) targets that might yield gold, copper, bismuth, cobalt, and molybdenum.

I spent a week at Great Bear Lake exploring the ruins of old mines and sleeping in the old RCMP detachment at Cameron Bay. Every day I ventured beyond the lodge imprint to search for evidence of the once bustling community from the 1930s. The two Hudson's Bay Company buildings were full of lodge furniture and supplies and Alberta Star geologists had been logging core in Gerhard's old log cabin. Next to the HBC post were the ruins of the government office later housing the family of respected Dene guide Edward Blondin. Its heavy cookstove had crashed through the floor planks into the cellar depression, leaving scattered timber debris.



**Cameron Bay buildings in July 2005: Hudson's Bay Company post and the RCMP detachment. (Ryan Silke photos)**

Further along the shore was the Great Bear Lake Lumber Company sawmill, now an overgrown lump of willow shrubs. Next was the Murphy Services compound, a collection of four or more log cabins, but decades later only pieces of tarpaper and rotting wood marks their locations. Around the bend in the bay was the iconic sandy knoll rising up from the waters. Canadian Airways Limited was based here as it offered a perfect, sheltered moorage for float planes. A cache on stilts once stood just up the hill.

At the top of the hill in the thick bushes was where Henry Swanson's trading post and Martin Gardner's Café stood. I could barely make out foundation depressions in the muskeg from these buildings. Further north from the sandy shore the bush was thick again and close observation revealed circular rock gardens. This was where Harry and Edna Reed operated the Lakeshore Inn, a collection of log cabins serving as restaurant, hotel, bunkhouses, and recreation hall. Archaeological surveying would be required to

delineate ruins beyond here, as time and nature has obliterated visual evidence of the many scattered prospector's tents and cabins that were once along this shoreline.

On the terrace above the fishing lodge and the old Hudson's Bay buildings there was a flat open field serving as a lodge storage yard and dump site. 1970s-era buried waste and old fuel drums marked Cameron Bay's parkland and field where tug of wars and baseball games were held every August 4<sup>th</sup> in 1932, 1933 and 1934. Somewhere to the east, in the overgrown bushes, was the log cabin dance hall of the NWT Prospectors Association, where the citizens all shared their yearly allotted liquor. Only a short distance from here I saw concrete pedestals that had something to do with the Royal Canadian Corp of Signals wireless station and massive antennas. There's nothing left from this important communication station. All the equipment of value was transferred to the Eldorado Mine in the 1940s when uranium started to be mined there.

Across the narrow water to the east, near the point of land where Cameron meets Echo Bay, was an abandoned boat. It rested up on the dry shore, marshaled out of the waves by someone perhaps planning to return again the next summer. The rotting wooden hull, diesel motor and miscellaneous parts of the rudder were intriguing reminders of the water freighting industry that helped to sustain the isolated community.

I spent a day being ferried to various old mines by helicopter and I roamed the hills alone to capture the best vantage points for photos. At Contact Lake, El-Bonanza, Bonanza, and the Crossfault Lake Mines there were still headframes standing over top of flooded shafts. Contact Lake boasted a large log cabin camp while ruins of other 1930s-1940s era buildings littered the woods of the other mines. The mines proved of little commercial value, and so everybody had left long ago. Buildings were hollowed out of anything that could be salvaged, left to slowly rot and slump into the forest floor, disappearing behind a screen of willows and alder bushes. Trash piles of tin cans and discarded machinery rusted nearby. There was a clear juxtaposition there; interesting ruins worthy of historical note, overshadowed by a buried, pervading contamination begging to be addressed. It was all a solemn affair as I was reminded what the human pursuit of resources inevitably does to planet Earth.

### ~ A Farewell ~

Fifteen years later, I don't know what is left of Cameron Bay <sup>143</sup>. The federal government has included it within a reserve that is not privy to land claim settlement, nor part of devolution to the territorial government. This means that the lands will need to be "remediated" prior to transfer to another land authority. No doubt, this would result in the destruction of what should be considered a heritage resource, but it isn't because as federal lands it does not fall under archaeological or heritage protection regulations. Historical value would appear to be subjective to the letter of the law.

The old uranium mine at Port Radium was finally cleaned up by the federal government in the summer of 2007. Little was left at that point: a few buildings at Crossfault Lake that had been used as a satellite mining operation by Eldorado in the

1940s, and a cabin on the hill of the Eldorado Mine which had been used as an RCMP detachment in the 1940s-1950s. A good friend from Norman Wells, Rick Muyres, dismantled that old cabin board by board and rebuilt it in his backyard. The cleanup crews hassled Rick for being there, yet even they had to admire his passionate gumption. Very few people cared about preserving the history of Port Radium given its toxic legacy. Other mines in the area, like Contact Lake or El-Bonanza, shared that fate, with nobody tasked to preserve their relics.

I did what I could to document what was left of this period in NWT history and wish I could have done more.<sup>144</sup> The NWT Mining Heritage Society in Yellowknife promoted better surveying, protection measures, and backhauling of machinery. To my knowledge, the government never hired any archaeologist to do a survey, even as they set the torches on the log cabins and headframes of those old mines that I saw in 2005.

Cameron Bay may eventually witness the same harsh treatment. And so, evidence of the Northwest Territories' first mineral boom is slowly fading away, as all things must eventually return to dust. Cameron Bay is not a recognized heritage site in the Northwest Territories. But it should be.

## Appendix

### Cameron Bay / Port Radium Lot and Block Information

Block	Lot	Ownership History	Built Infrastructure
1	1	Marion L. Ryan owner of Anna 2 mineral claims (1933) > Marion L. Ryan lease cancelled Feb 4, 1938	Martin Gardner's restaurant (1933-1938)
1	2	Marion L. Ryan owner of Anna 2 mineral claims (1933) > Marion L. Ryan lease cancelled Feb 4, 1938	Henry Swanson's trading post (1933-1934)
1	3	CPA wireless station and storage buildings (1933) > Canadian Pacific Air Lines lease cancelled July 1954	CPA Wireless Station (1932-1933)
1	4	CPA wireless station and storage buildings (1933) > location of Post Office July 1938 > Canadian Pacific Air Lines lease cancelled July 1954	CPA Wireless Station (1932-1933)
1	5	Dept of Interior government office (1933) > Government reservation (1934) > Dept of Mines and Resources reservation cancelled July 1955 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	6	Murphy Services Ltd proposed cooks residence (1933) > Murphy Services, no buildings (1934) > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	7	Murphy Services Ltd restaurant and cabin (1933) > Murphy Services log cabin 38x18' with kitchen available for sale through liquidation of Murphy Services (1934) > Marie and Tony Onraet lease cancelled Aug 31, 1937 > Jack Duvelle lease cancelled April 15, 1941 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Murphy Services Ltd bunkhouse and cookhouse (1932-1934) > "Radium Café" (1937-1938)
1	8	Murphy Services Ltd cabin (1933) > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Murphy Services Ltd bunkhouse (1932-1934)
1	9	Murphy Services Ltd store and post office (1933) > Florence Ingraham lease expired Dec 31, 1940 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Murphy Services Ltd store and post office (1932-1934)
1	10	Murphy Services Ltd storage yard for boats (1933) > Florence Ingraham lease expired Dec 31, 1940 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	11	Murphy Services Ltd residence (1933) > Florence Ingraham lease expired Dec 31, 1940 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Murphy Services Ltd residence (1932-1934)
1	12	Murphy Services Ltd warehouse (1933) > Florence Ingraham lease expired Dec 31, 1940 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Murphy Services Ltd warehouse (1932-1934)
1	13	Murphy Services Ltd proposed machine and carpenter shop (1933) > Clarence Marshall lease cancelled Feb 13 1936 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	14	Northern Waterways Ltd proposed warehouse and wharf (1933) > NTCL lease cancelled Aug 15, 1940 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	15	J.G. Hebden sawmill-machine shop (1933) > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Sawmill (1933)

1	16	J.G. Hebden sawmill-machine shop (1933) > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Sawmill (1933)
1	17	J.F. McDonald application for lease (1933) > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	18	Steve Yanick Jr. application for lease (1933) > Steve Yanick Jr vegetable warehouse 15x11' (1933) > Steve Yanick Jr log house (1934) > Sold to Government for Mining Recorder's office (Aug 1934) > Frobisher Exploration is renting log cabin 38x18' from government (1944) > Edward Blondin is renting the cabin from government on a monthly rental (c.1950) > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Steve Yanick vegetable warehouse (1933) > Steve Yanick's house (1934) > Mining Recorder's Office (1934-1936) > Edward Blondin's house (1950s)
1	19	HBC trading post built August 1933 > HBC lease renewed to July 20, 1954 > lease 10-years from July 21, 1954 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Hudson's Bay Company post (1933-1941)
1	20	HBC trading post built August 1933 > HBC lease renewed to July 20, 1954 > lease 10-years from July 21, 1954 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Hudson's Bay Company post (1933-1941)
1	21	HBC trading post built August 1933 > Roman Catholic Mission (c.1945) > HBC lease renewed to July 20, 1954 > lease 10-years from July 21, 1954 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	Hudson's Bay Company post (1933-1941)
1	22	J.D. Nicholson application for lease (1933) > J.D. Nicholson lease cancelled Jan 19, 1938 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	23	J. Gerhard application for lease for residence and business (1933) > Joseph Gerhard log house 20x20' with lean-to kitchen 18x13' (1934) > RCMP rents this house winter 1933-1934 > Joseph Gerhard sells log cabin to Darcy Arden, April 1934 > Darcy Arden lease cancelled April 21, 1941 > Roman Catholic Epis Corp of Mackenzie lease renewed to Aug 31, 1951 > ten years from Sep 1, 1961	Joe Gerhard cabin (1933) > RCMP detachment (1933-1934) > Darcy Arden cabin (1934-1937)
1	24	J. Gerhard application for lease for residence and business (1933) > Darcy Arden lease cancelled April 21, 1941 > Roman Catholic Epis Corp of Mackenzie lease renewed to Aug 31, 1951 > ten years from Sep 1, 1961	
1	25	Nere Robert application for lease for residence and business (1933) > Frank Cousineau lease cancelled Jan 19, 1938 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	26	W.H. McDougall application for lease for residence and business (1933) > W.H. McDougall lease cancelled Jan 19, 1938 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	27	E. Van Humbeck application for lease for residence and business (1933) > Eugene Van Humbeck lease cancelled Oct 17, 1938 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	28	N.W. Radium Minerals application for lease mining business (1933) > Northwest Radium Minerals Ltd lease not executed in 1935 > John Tom and Jeanne Branson agreement of sale Dec 6, 1966	
1	29	D.F. Lent application for lease residence and business (1933) > D.F. Lent lease cancelled March 4, 1938	

1	30	Anglican Mission application for lease residence, no fee required (1933) > Bishop Geddes (1933) > Synod Diocese Athabaska lease cancelled July 28, 1939	
1	31	RCMP reserved for detachment buildings, no fee required (1933) > RCMP reservation Oct 18, 1934 > cancelled Aug 31, 1983	RCMP detachment (1934-1942)
2	1	M.L. Ryan (1933) owner of mineral claim Anna 3 > Marion L. Ryan lease cancelled Feb 4, 1938	
2	2	M.L. Ryan (1933) owner of mineral claim Anna 3 > Marion L. Ryan lease cancelled Feb 4, 1938	
2	3	Eldorado Gold Mines Ltd application for lease for mining business (1933) > Eldorado Mining & Refining Ltd lease renewed to July 20, 1954 > cancelled 1954	
2	4	Clifford C. Macklin application for lease (1933) > Clifford C. Macklin log cabin 13.5x11.5' (1934), Mackay Meikle was renting as a sub-tenant for a few month (prior to April 1934) > Clifford Macklin lease cancelled Sept 22, 1939	Cabin occupied by Cliff Macklin (1933-1934)
2	5	A.S. Dart application for lease (1933) > Sam Otto Lease expired Jan 31, 1952	Cabin occupied by A.S. Dart (1933)
2	6	Pete Racine application for lease (1933) > Pete Racine log cabin 18x15' (1934) > Redemptur A. Vachon lease cancelled April 12, 1941	Cabin occupied by Pete Racine (1933-1934)
2	7	H.A. Swanson application for lease for residence and boats (1933)	
2	8	Radford Syndicate Ltd application for lease for residence (1933) > Canadian Pacific Air Lines lease cancelled July 1954	Cabin occupied by Radford Syndicate (1933)
2	9	C.M.&S. Co of Canada application for lease for mining business (1933) > Consolidated Mining & Smelting lease cancelled July 23, 1947	
2	10	Harry Reed application for lease for restaurant and residence and bunkhouse (1933) > Harry Reed for restaurant (1936) > Edna Reed (1937) > Martin Bode lease cancelled June 11, 1941	"Lakeshore Inn" (1932-1937)
2	11	Harry Reed application for lease for restaurant and residence and bunkhouse (1933) > Harry Reed applies to build pumphouse on reserve shoreline (1935) > Harry Reed for restaurant (1936) > Edna Reed sells to RC Church (1938) > RC Epis Corp lease cancelled Aug 27, 1941	"Lakeshore Inn" (1932-1937)
2	12	Harry Reed application for lease for restaurant and residence and bunkhouse (1933) > Harry Reed for restaurant (1936) > Edna Reed sells to RC Church (1938) > RC Epis Corp lease cancelled Aug 27, 1941	"Lakeshore Inn" (1932-1937)
2	13	Great Bear Lake Mines Ltd. application for lease for mining business (1933) > Harry Reed for restaurant (1936) > Edna Reed sells to Roman Catholic Church (1938) > Roman Catholic Epis Corp lease cancelled Aug 27, 1941	
2	14	Bear Exploration and Radium Ltd application for lease for mining business and residence (1933) > BEAR lease cancelled March 5, 1938	
2	15	Bear Exploration and Radium Ltd application for lease for mining business warehouse (1933) > BEAR lease cancelled March 5, 1938	
4	1	Martin Gardner application for lease (1933) > Martin Gardner lease cancelled Sept 15, 1943	Martin Gardner's icehouse and bunkhouse (1933-1938)



4	2	Henry A. Swanson application for lease (1933) > Clarence Entwisle lease cancelled June 28, 1941	
4	3	Henry A. Swanson application for lease (1933) > Clarence Entwisle lease cancelled June 28, 1941	
4	4	Dept of Interior wood and material stockyard (1933) > Dept of Mines and Resources reservation Aug 21, 1933 storage yard for wood and materials > cancelled July 8, 1955	
4	5	Pete Racine application for lease, said to be rocky unsuitable land (1933) > Pete Racine pool hall (1934-1935) > W.J. Wylie pool hall (1935-1936) > Pete Racine lease cancelled Sep 21, 1936	Pete Racine's pool hall (1934-1935) > W.J. Wylie pool hall (1935-1936)
4	6	Pete Racine application for lease, said to be rocky unsuitable land (1933) > Pete Racine (1934) > Bert Neiland lease cancelled Jan 16, 1939 > Dept of National Defence reservation Jan 17, 1939 > cancelled July 7, 1955	
4	7	Lambert A Turcotte application for lease (1933) > Lambert Turcotte lease cancelled March 3, 1938 > DND reservation Aug 31, 1938 > cancelled July 1955	Tent or building occupied by Lambert Turcotte (1933)
4	8	Royal Canadian Corp of Signals wireless radio station, no fee required (1933) > DND reservation Oct 18, 1934 > cancelled July 1955	Wireless Radio Station and warehouse (1933-1942)
4	9	Royal Canadian Corp of Signals wireless radio station (1933) > DND reservation Aug 31, 1938 > cancelled July 1955	Wireless Radio Station and warehouse (1933-1942)
4	10	Northwest Territories Prospectors Association (1933) > NWT Prospectors Association lease cancelled March 3, 1938	NWT Prospector's Association hall (1934)
4	11	Ben Alexander application for lease (1933)	
4	12	Reserved for suitable site for bank (1933)	
4	13	Andrew Nelson application for lease (1933)	
4	14	Dr. T.O. Byrnes medical office (1933-1935) > DND reservation Aug 31, 1938 > cancelled July 1955	Dr. Thomas Byrne's office, medical health officer (1933-1935)
4	15	Joseph D. McDonnell application for lease (1933) > Joseph D. McDonnell lease cancelled Mar 26, 1936 > DND reservation Aug 31, 1938 > cancelled July 1955	
4	16	Arthur Bird application for lease (1933) > Jack Doucet lease cancelled July 30, 1937	
4	17	Anglican Mission church, no fee required (1933) > Bishop Geddes (1933)> Synod Diocese Athabaska lease cancelled July 28, 1939	
4	18	Reservation for public park (1933) > Dept of Resources and Development reservation for parkland Oct 18, 1934 > cancelled July 8, 1955	
4	19	--	
4	20	--	
4	21	--	
4	22	--	
4	23	William John Wylie residence (1933) > William John Wylie lease cancelled Jan 28, 1937	
4	24	William John Wylie residence (1933) > William John Wylie lease cancelled Jan 28, 1937 > DND reservation Aug 31, 1938 > cancelled July 1955	

4	25	DND reservation Aug 31, 1938 > cancelled July 1955	
4	26	DND reservation Aug 31, 1938 > cancelled July 1955	
4	27	S. Yanick Jr. application for lease for residence (1933) > DND reservation Aug 31, 1938 > cancelled July 1955	
4	28	Martin Gardner application for lease for bunkhouses etc (1933) > Martin Oliver Gardner lease renewed to July 20, 1944 > cancelled Sept 15, 1943	
5	1	RCMP detachment buildings, no fee required (1933) > RCMP reservation Oct 18, 1938 > cancelled July 31, 1983	
5	2	Dept of Interior government representative residence (1933) > Dept of Resources and Development reservation Oct 18, 1938 > cancelled July 1955	
5	3	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, hospital, school, garden, etc (1933) > RC Mission (1941) > Roman Catholic Epis Corp of Mckenzie lease renewed to July 1951 > lease ten years from Sep 1, 1961	
5	4	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, hospital, school, garden, etc, no fee required (1933)	
5	5	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, hospital, school, garden, etc, no fee required (1933)	
5	6	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, hospital, school, garden, etc, no fee required (1933)	
5	7	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, hospital, school, garden, etc, no fee required (1933)	
5	8	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, hospital, school, garden, etc, no fee required (1933)	
5	9	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, hospital, school, garden, etc, no fee required (1933)	
5	10	--	
5	11	--	
5A	1	Dept of Interior government representative residence (1933)	
5A	2	Mrs. V. Ingraham application for lease (1933)	
5A	3	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, no fee required (1933)	
5A	4	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, no fee required (1933)	
5A	5	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, no fee required (1933)	
5A	6	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, no fee required (1933)	
5A	7	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, no fee required (1933)	
5A	8	Reserved for Roman Catholic mission, no fee required (1933)	
9	1	A. Kerr and J.M. McAfee application for lease (1933)	Cabin occupied by A. Kerr and J. McAfee (1933)
9	2	William Johnson application for lease (1933)	
9	3	J.P. Dolan application for lease (1933)	
9	4	John McWilliam application for lease (1933)	
9	5	R.A. McClure application for lease (1933)	
9	6	--	

9	7	D.H. McDonald application for lease (1933)	
9	8	HBC lease cancelled July 12, 1939	
9	9	HBC lease cancelled July 12, 1939	
9	10	William R. Wilson lease cancelled March 3, 1938	
9	11	--	
15	1	R. Caldwell application for lease (1933) > Harold Tinney lease cancelled July 29, 1938	Cabin occupied by R. Caldwell (1933)
15	2	--	
15	3	--	
15	4	--	
15	5	--	
15	6	--	
15	7	Frank Chaisson application for lease (1933) > Frank Chaisson lease cancelled March 1938	
15	8	Frank Chaisson application for lease (1933) > Frank Chaisson lease cancelled March 1938	Cabin occupied by Frank Chaisson (1933)
15	9	John LaBine application for lease, proposed residence (1933)	
15	10	--	
15	11	--	
15	12	--	
15	13	Joe Radermacher application for lease (1933) > Alexander E. Sutherland lease cancelled Jan 23, 1950	Cabin occupied by Joe Radermacher (1933)
15A	1	Dr. T.O. Byrnes for residence (1933)	
15A	2	Dr. T.O. Byrnes for residence (1933)	
15A	3	--	
15A	4	--	
15A	5	--	
15A	6	--	
15A	7	--	
15A	8	--	
15A	9	--	
15A	10	--	
15A	11	--	
15A	12	--	
15A	13	--	

unsurveyed parcel		RCMP reservation April 28, 1934 between Block 5 Lot 1 and Block 1 Lot 31	
unsurveyed parcel		Royal Canadian Corp of Signals transmitter station, frame building 24x26', with office, three bedrooms, and kitchen. Log warehouse, 15x15'	Wireless Radio Station (1933-1942)
unsurveyed lot		W.L. Olmsted application for lease, southeast Cameron Bay entrance	
unsurveyed lot		A.G. Eecles application for lease, southeast shore Cameron Bay	
unsurveyed lot		D.J. McDonnell application for lease for lumber yard, east side of Cameron Bay	

## References

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Johnson, Lionel. "The Great Bear Lake: It's place in history" *Arctic*, Volume 28, No. 4, December 1975, pp 231-244
- <sup>2</sup> "If Only We Had Known: The History of Port Radium as told by the Sahtúot'ine" Déline First Nation, 2006
- <sup>3</sup> Morris, Margaret. "Great Bear Lake Indians: A Historical Demography and Human Ecology, Parts 1 and 2" *Musk-Ox* No. 11 and No. 12, 1972 and 1973
- <sup>4</sup> Wentzell, W.F. "Account of Mackenzie River" in "North of Athabasca: Slave Lake and Mackenzie River Documents of the North West Company, 1800-1821" Edited by Keith Lloyd. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. pp. 353-354
- <sup>5</sup> "Has spent 18 years at Great Bear Lake" *The Toronto Star*, December 23, 1931
- <sup>6</sup> For Gilbert LaBine biographical information and his version of the general sequence of discovery at Great Bear Lake, see: Bothwell, Robert. "Eldorado: Canada's National Uranium Company." Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984; Lonon, George. "About Men and Mines." Toronto: Pitt Publishing Co., 1962; Newman, Peter C. "Flame of Power: Intimate Profiles of Canada's Greatest Businessmen." Toronto: Longmans, Green & Company, 1959; and Canadian Mining Hall of Fame.
- <sup>7</sup> Geological Survey of Canada Annual Report 1900, p. 102A
- <sup>8</sup> "Three men in a boat visit arctic prospecting ground" *The Northern Miner*, July 16, 1931
- <sup>9</sup> Bothwell, Robert. "Eldorado: Canada's National Uranium Company." Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984. pp. 22-23
- <sup>10</sup> LeBourdais, D.M. "Metals and Men: The Story of Canadian Mining" Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1957, pp. 373 to 375; Kupsch, W.O. "From Erzgebirge to Cluff Lake – A Scientific Journey Through Time" *Musk-Ox* No. 23, 1978
- <sup>11</sup> Newman, Peter C. "Flame of Power: Intimate Profiles of Canada's Greatest Businessmen" Toronto: Longmans, Green & Company, 1959. p. 156
- <sup>12</sup> Newman, p. 158
- <sup>13</sup> "Toronto pair claim radium found in north" *The Toronto Star*, October 7, 1930
- <sup>14</sup> "Eldorado remains mysterious" *The Northern Miner*, April 9, 1931
- <sup>15</sup> Spence's report was partially published in *The Toronto Star* April 6, 1931
- <sup>16</sup> Bothwell, pp. 55-58
- <sup>17</sup> Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1933, p.33
- <sup>18</sup> Cumming, A.L. "Report on Prospecting and Mining Operations, Great Bear Lake Area, North West Territories, Summer Season 1930" Department of the Interior, Supervisory Mining Engineer's Office, Fort Smith, NWT, December 31, 1930
- <sup>19</sup> Watt, Frederick B. "Great Bear: A Journey Remembered" Yellowknife: Outcrop Ltd, 1980. p. 2
- <sup>20</sup> "Youths planning overland journey Great Bear Lake" *The Edmonton Journal*, March 17, 1932; "10 Young Men on Expedition" *The Edmonton Bulletin*, May 4, 1933
- <sup>21</sup> "Mush from arctic coast to stake at Great Bear" *The Edmonton Journal*, March 31, 1932

- 
- <sup>22</sup> “Airman from Bear Lake is missing thug” The Edmonton Bulletin, February 6, 1933; “Girouard brothers now serving prison terms” The Edmonton Bulletin, May 4, 1933
- <sup>23</sup> “Boston groups to seek radium at Great Bear” The Edmonton Journal, March 19, 1932; “Burwash says rail line to Bear possible” The Edmonton Bulletin, March 21, 1932
- <sup>24</sup> Kidd, D.F. “Great Bear Lake Area, Northwest Territories” Geological Survey of Canada Summary Report, Part C, 1932; Kidd, D.F. “Rae to Great Bear Lake, Mackenzie District, NWT” Geological Survey of Canada Memoir 187, 1936
- <sup>25</sup> “Water transport co. moves to Great Bear” The Edmonton Bulletin, March 14, 1933; “Farmers get into action Peace River” The Edmonton Bulletin, May 30, 1933
- <sup>26</sup> “Great Bear fleet at Peace River” The Edmonton Bulletin, June 15, 1933; “Steady stream of outfits head for Great Bear Lake” The Edmonton Bulletin, August 7, 1933
- <sup>27</sup> Peet, Fred. “Miners and Moonshiners” Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1983. p. 83
- <sup>28</sup> Randall, Jack. “Radium Lure” The Edmonton Bulletin, January 1933
- <sup>29</sup> Peet, p. 57
- <sup>30</sup> “Ground route from Fort Rae to Hottah Lake and Cameron Bay” The Bear Lake Miner, May 1934
- <sup>31</sup> McNiven, J.G. “History of the Eldorado Mine, Port Radium” The Canadian Mining and Metallurgical Bulletin, November 1967
- <sup>32</sup> “Pioneer gives first hand facts on Great Bear Lake” The Northern Miner, March 24, 1932; Finnie, Richard. “Battling the Great Bear River” The Beaver, March 1935
- <sup>33</sup> The Edmonton Journal, May 4, 1935
- <sup>34</sup> Finnie, Richard. “Battling the Great Bear River” The Beaver, March 1935
- <sup>35</sup> “North transport starting May 16” The Edmonton Journal, May 4, 1935
- <sup>36</sup> “Fuel oil pipeline” The Northern Miner, September 2, 1937
- <sup>37</sup> “Northern fleet augmented” The Northern Miner, July 15, 1937
- <sup>38</sup> Bothwell, p. 357
- <sup>39</sup> “If Only We Had Known: The History of Port Radium as told by the Sahtúot’ine” Déline First Nation, 2006. p. 25
- <sup>40</sup> “Rival towns develop fast on gold coast” The Calgary Daily Herald, May 7, 1932; “Cameron Bay now thriving village in north country” The Ottawa Citizen, April 18, 1933
- <sup>41</sup> Dr. Bourget’s report on treaty trip and payment of annuities to the Indians of the Great Slave Lake district summer of 1934 (National Archives of Canada, RG 10 Volume 6879 File 191/28-3)
- <sup>42</sup> “Hundreds of claims staked in northern mineral area” The Edmonton Journal, March 4, 1932
- <sup>43</sup> “Indian gets \$33,000 for silver claim” The Edmonton Bulletin, August 22, 1933
- <sup>44</sup> “Nose led to radium find” The Border Cities Star, March 22, 1934
- <sup>45</sup> For stories of Port Radium from the Dene community perspective, see: “If Only We Had Known: The History of Port Radium as told by the Sahtúot’ine” Déline First Nation, 2006.

- 
- <sup>46</sup> Watt, pp.33-34; if a mineral claim is located more than 100 miles from a recording office, an emergency recorder is appointed to collect the information and travel to the nearest office, in this case Fort Smith.
- <sup>47</sup> “Recorder swamped by rush of northern mineral claims” The Edmonton Journal, April 21, 1932
- <sup>48</sup> “Northern pioneer has interesting experiences” News of the North March 11, 1949
- <sup>49</sup> Peet, p. 62
- <sup>50</sup> Watt, Erik. “History and Mystery” Up Here Magazine, January/February 1999
- <sup>51</sup> Watt, Frederick B. “Great Bear: A Journey Remembered.” Yellowknife: Outcrop Ltd., 1980
- <sup>52</sup> “Rival towns develop fast on gold coast” The Calgary Daily Herald, May 7, 1932
- <sup>53</sup> “Plan operation new transports Great Bear Lake” The Edmonton Journal, April 16, 1932
- <sup>54</sup> Airth, W.B. “Epic of the northern wastes: the sinking of the Speed” The Northern Miner, December 21, 1933
- <sup>55</sup> “Can. Airways north freight has increased” The Edmonton Bulletin, Feb 22, 1933
- <sup>56</sup> The Edmonton Bulletin, January 16, 1933
- <sup>57</sup> For details of each accident: Vance, The Toronto Star, July 14, 1930; Cruikshank, “Great Bear: A Journey Remembered” by Frederick Watt; Calder, The Edmonton Bulletin, February 6, 1933.
- <sup>58</sup> Dickie, Bonnie. “Bellanca Aircruiser” Up Here Magazine, February/March 1986.
- <sup>59</sup> Dominion Land Act, Chapter 113, Section 78, RSC 1927
- <sup>60</sup> Meikle to Hume, October 25, 1932 (National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 855, Reel T-13352, File 8017)
- <sup>61</sup> Ryan to Hume, November 26, 1932 (National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 855, Reel T-13352, File 8017)
- <sup>62</sup> “Townsite of Cameron Bay under survey”, The Edmonton Bulletin, May 22, 1933; National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 855, Reel T-13352, File 8017
- <sup>63</sup> “Mining recorder is busy man” The Northern Miner, April 28, 1932
- <sup>64</sup> “Nine Mounties will go north” The Edmonton Bulletin, June 6, 1933; National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 1628, File 12076
- <sup>65</sup> Laytha, Edgar. “North Again for Gold: Birth of Canada’s Arctic Empire” New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1939. pp. 107-108
- <sup>66</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 1628, File 12076
- <sup>67</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 2133, Reel T-14217, File 8142
- <sup>68</sup> Payne, Alice V. “Quin Kola: Tom Payne’s Search for Gold” Okotoks: Crossfield Publishing Ltd, 2000. pp. 60-69
- <sup>69</sup> “Bear Lake lumber company formed” The Edmonton Bulletin, July 15, 1933
- <sup>70</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 855, Reel T-13352, File 8017

- 
- <sup>71</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 2133, Reel T-14217, File 8058; National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 1628, File 12076
- <sup>72</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 2133, Reel T-14217, Files 8092 and 8093
- <sup>73</sup> McNiven, 1967; "Hewers of wood haulers of water" *The Yellowknifer*, June 27, 1984
- <sup>74</sup> Peet, p. 38
- <sup>75</sup> Watt, Frederick. "Great Bear's Daughters" *Canadian Home Journal*, February 1934
- <sup>76</sup> "Cameron Bay growth told by argonaut" *The Edmonton Bulletin*, April 18, 1933
- <sup>77</sup> Watt, 1934; "Spokane couple brave Great Bear Lake cold" *The Spokane Daily Chronicle*, November 1, 1934; "New name in the arctic" *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, October 14, 1937; Peet
- <sup>78</sup> *The Sphere*, September 1, 1934
- <sup>79</sup> "Open water at Cameron Bay" *The Edmonton Bulletin* June 6, 1933
- <sup>80</sup> "Women on arctic's rim never have idle hands" *The Edmonton Journal*, August 11, 1934
- <sup>81</sup> Peet, pp. 86-87, 104; "To Great Slave and Great Bear: P.G. Downes Journal of Travels North" *Arctic*, Vol. 39, No. 1, March 1986
- <sup>82</sup> *The Beaver Magazine*, March 1934; *The Edmonton Bulletin*, June 13, 1933
- <sup>83</sup> *The Beaver Magazine*, various issues 1934-1940
- <sup>84</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 866, Reel T-13359, File 8333
- <sup>85</sup> "Canada's newest town has its first doctor" *Greensburg Daily Tribune*, May 11, 1933; "Ingraham pleads for hospital at Bear Lake" *The Edmonton Journal*, August 10, 1934
- <sup>86</sup> Appendix to NWT Council Minutes, January 23, 1935
- <sup>87</sup> "Mining town on arctic rim staging steady business gain" *The Calgary Daily Herald*, April 27, 1935
- <sup>88</sup> Peet, p. 104
- <sup>89</sup> NWT Council Minutes, October 17, 1934. (NWT Archives G-1979-042 Series 1)
- <sup>90</sup> "Cameron Bay growth told by argonaut" *The Edmonton Bulletin*, April 18, 1933
- <sup>91</sup> "Mine superstition defied, women enter Great Bear pit" *The Edmonton Journal*, August 14, 1934; Peet, p. 116
- <sup>92</sup> "Cost of living high in north" *The Edmonton Bulletin*, Sept 8, 1932
- <sup>93</sup> "Mine superstition defied, women enter Great Bear pit" *The Edmonton Journal*, August 14, 1934
- <sup>94</sup> Cooper, Courtney Ryley. "The trail of '32" *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 12, 1932
- <sup>95</sup> "Great Bear Lake is calling you! Second annual excursion to picnic and sports" Information booklet, August 4, 1933 (National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 1625, File 11337)
- <sup>96</sup> "Great Bear Lake has model CNE" *The Globe and Mail*, August 17, 1933; Peet, pp. 87-88
- <sup>97</sup> Peet pp. 97-98



- 
- <sup>98</sup> “Northerners celebrate in big way” Saskatoon Star Phoenix, August 6, 1934; “Presentation to Ingraham opens Great Bear picnic” The Edmonton Journal, August 6, 1934
- <sup>99</sup> NWT Archives/N-1989-025
- <sup>100</sup> Onraet, Tony. “Sixty Below” London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1944
- <sup>101</sup> Spry, Irene. “A Journey Down North to Great Bear Lake and the Yukon in 1935” Musk-Ox Magazine #31, 1982. pp.73-78
- <sup>102</sup> Peet, pp. 112-113
- <sup>103</sup> Watt, p. 193
- <sup>104</sup> Payne, Alice V. “Quin Kola: Tom Payne’s Search for Gold” Okotoks: Crossfield Publishing Ltd, 2000. pp. 60-69
- <sup>105</sup> Byrne, J.J. “Autobiography of J.J. Byrne” Toronto: J.J. Byrne, 1971. pp. 134-141
- <sup>106</sup> “Great Bear Lake rescue” The Canadian Aviation Historical Society Journal, Fall 1976
- <sup>107</sup> Onraet, pp. 65-66; Peet, pp. 101-102
- <sup>108</sup> “Edmontonian drowns when canoe upsets” The Edmonton Bulletin, August 30, 1933
- <sup>109</sup> “Government building burns in Great Bear Lake” The Globe and Mail, September 12, 1933; “Fire destroys radio station” The Edmonton Bulletin, September 11, 1933
- <sup>110</sup> Peet, pp. 90-91
- <sup>111</sup> Canadian Airways Limited Bulletin, August 1934
- <sup>112</sup> “Albertan drowns at Cameron Bay” The Edmonton Journal, August 6, 1934
- <sup>113</sup> “Police halt search for prospector” The Calgary Daily Herald, March 11, 1935; Peet, pp. 102-103
- <sup>114</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 866, Reel T-13359, File 8333
- <sup>115</sup> NWT Archives/N-1989-025
- <sup>116</sup> “Tragedy strikes Ingrahams again” The Edmonton Journal, January 6, 1936
- <sup>117</sup> “Takes own life in north cabin” The Edmonton Journal, January 11, 1936
- <sup>118</sup> “Dominion radio post burns at Cameron Bay” The Montreal Gazette, April 8, 1936; NWT Archives N-1989-25
- <sup>119</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 879, File 8948
- <sup>120</sup> “Northern miner drowns in lake” The Globe and Mail, August 9, 1937
- <sup>121</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 895, File 9450
- <sup>122</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 953, Reel T-13950, File 13281
- <sup>123</sup> “Fatal Accident at Eldorado” The News of the North, April 13, 1946
- <sup>124</sup> For a detailed history of the following mines, see: Silke, Ryan “The Operational History of Mines in the Northwest Territories, Canada” Self published, 2009
- <sup>125</sup> “Mercury hits 73 below at Cameron Bay” The Leader Post, January 4, 1935. The article doesn’t say but presumably this is -70 degrees Fahrenheit.

- 
- <sup>126</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 1628, File 12076
- <sup>127</sup> Peet, p. 118
- <sup>128</sup> Saskatoon Star Phoenix, February 27, 1937
- <sup>129</sup> The Toronto Star, February 28, 1938
- <sup>130</sup> “Promotion period over in GBL” The Edmonton Journal, August 31, 1935
- <sup>131</sup> “Tweedsmuir visits Eldorado Mine” The Edmonton Journal, August 7, 1937; “Tweedsmuir sees northern mines” The Edmonton Journal, August 9, 1937; The Globe and Mail, October 14, 1937
- <sup>132</sup> “New name in the arctic” Saskatoon Star Phoenix, October 14, 1937
- <sup>133</sup> Onraet, Tony. “Sixty Below” London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1944. pp. 179-180
- <sup>134</sup> Laytha, p. 104
- <sup>135</sup> “To Great Slave and Great Bear: P.G. Downes Journal of Travels North” Arctic, Vol. 39, No. 1, March 1986
- <sup>136</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 1628, File 12076; National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 911, Reel T-13924, File 10744
- <sup>137</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 1575, File 3102; National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 911, Reel T-13924, File 10744
- <sup>138</sup> The Yellowknife Blade, August 31, 1941
- <sup>139</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 1628, File 12076; National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 911, Reel T-13924, File 10744
- <sup>140</sup> National Archives of Canada, RG 85, Volume 962, Reel T-13956, File 13687
- <sup>141</sup> NWT Archives/Henry Busse Collection/N-1979-052: 1720
- <sup>142</sup> Watt, Erik. “History and Mystery” Up Here Magazine, January/February 1999
- <sup>143</sup> Google Earth imagery dated May 2015 suggests the buildings I saw in 2005 were still there.
- <sup>144</sup> See my photographs and documentation on Cameron Bay and mines of the region: NWT Archives N-2005-018: 1-11



