

Findlay



John Findlay came from Ontario. He owned the property now known as the Serwa property. He seems to have acquired 160 acres on the south side of Mission Creek (DL4091) about 1910. In 1929, he acquired a second Crown Grant, (DL 3753) on the north side of the creek which added another 160 acres to his holding. On his first quarter section, he built a saw mill and then a fine large two-storey house which was moved to the Silver Lake Fish Camp where it burned down in the fires of the summer of 2003. His mill was apparently a masterpiece of hand-made often wooden equipment. He was a very hard worker and a very handy man. He remained single, but for several years his parents lived with him and his sister, Margaret. He and Martin Band built many of the Joe Rich homes and buildings including not only the log and lumber work, but also the stone work.

John Findlay also brought water to his property by digging a very long ditch from Joe Rich Creek on Black's property (now Dion's) along the edge of the hills on the south west side of Joe Rich Valley. This was all done with a horse and scoop and was not financed by the government. It was an impressive piece of work, but apparently was never very functional.

Findlay, though a bachelor, was very active in the community. He helped build the schoolhouse, was a big contributor to the school and for a time was the school board secretary. He was also generous with his fine home. When the Philpott home burned down in 1929, he had the Philpott family stay with him while he and others helped build them a new home. Mary Weddell's diary indicates that he was a frequent visitor to the Weddell family. He was a busy and well-liked man.

John Findlay's sister, Margaret married Frank Nicolas. Mary Shanks who became Mrs. Cyril Weddell lived with the Nicholases during the year she taught at the Joe Rich School, and as a result became a close friend of Mrs. Nicolas.

Findlay had an old flatbed truck with which he hauled lumber. In 1949, he had injured his leg and was wearing a cast. He was used to figuring things out for himself and so took his own cast off and was driving to town past the pond below Black Mountain on the Joe Rich gravel road. He may have stressed his leg and passed out. No one knows, but in any case, at the bad corner beside the pond his truck rolled over. Its wooden cab collapsed. He was crushed and died on June 1, 1946 at the age of 69.

Findlay's mill was left vacant. When Jack Serwa and Harry Gibbons bought the property in 1946, Gibbons tried to get it working. He couldn't figure it out and so ended up pushing it into a pile and setting fire to it. Later, Mr. Serwa operated a small mill on the property in the late 1940s. For a while, the Serwas considered moving to Joe Rich to live on the property, but Mrs. Serwa had grown up in a very small prairie town and had no desire to return to rural living. Various people lived on the property. Amongst them were horse loggers, Albert and Slim Coghill. Later, Peter Griffith lived in the house. He was a skilled log house builder and in 1977, built the house for the Hanns in which the Sinclairs now live.

For a while, hippies lived in the old Findlay home. When a couple of them decided to get married, they arranged to have the ceremony in one of the meadows. Gert Weddell was invited with her mother-in-law, Mary and the children. One of the couple's parents was a Toronto doctor who also came for the wedding. He was not used to the life style his daughter had adopted. He had not been told that a crow lived in the house and was a little upset to find that his good clothes for the wedding had been splotted when the crow found them a convenient place to relieve himself. Amongst the hippies was a young woman with a new baby. During the festivities, she undid her top and nursed the baby for all to see. The doctor remarked to Gert, "I guess that's what they mean when they say, 'Letting it all hang out'". For the wedding, the bridesmaid wore a blouse made from a gunny sack, and completed her ensemble with grey socks and boots.

On a winter day sometime later, Pat Russell contacted Weddells to report that smoke was coming out of the Findlay house. The Weddells and Russells quickly drove over and found that the hippies had been heating water for a sauna and had left the house with the water still heating. The heat got too much and the house caught fire. Weddells and Russells found a bucket and with snow managed to extinguish the fire, but not before the windows broke from the heat.