

On the 29th of July, 1916 a disastrous bush fire, destroyed most of the settlement. Days of confusion and grief followed the fire. Many had no home and there were so many bodies and no coffins.

Many bodies were so badly burned they were never identified. But after a time people began to rally. The government sent in lumber and building materials to re-build. Different organizations provided clothing and food for those who remained.

SPECIAL EVENTS OF MONTEITH HISTORY

In the early days most of the land in and around Monteith were covered with bush, mostly evergreen trees, and the old homes were literally carved out of the bush.

One of the dangers dreaded was a forest fire and on July 29 of 1916, after a spell of dry weather, the danger struck and the forest began to burn. The sky was a haze from the oily smoke.

Many homes were burned and many people lost their lives. There was a great deal of suffering, farm animals were burned.

Some of those who lost their lives were:

Mrs. William McClinchy and daughter Pearl, who were suffocated in a well, where they had gone to stand with a neighbour, Mrs. Wm. Coleman. Smoke from their burning home had blown directly into the well. The husbands had been away working and could not get to their homes because of the burning bush. Mr. and Mrs. Norman Green and Mr. Reynolds also perished. They lived nearby the McClinchy farm. Mr. Moe Poirier was the only one of his family saved. Two families who had fled to a root house on the present Ayers place were suffocated by smoke, among them a mother, whose babe was born while the fire was on. There were 10 in the roothouse. They were members of the MacMillan and Campbell families.

But shortly afterward people began building again on the present site of Monteith. Lumber was supplied, relief (help) to settlers who had lost their homes.

In 1916, a mill was built near the dam, and was known as the Monteith Pulp and Lumber Company. This attracted workers, a boarding house was built, also a store with cottages for workers' families. This mill later, was operated by Tescendon Co. and later changed hands and became the Hawk Lake Mill, in charge of Mr. A. E. Wick and also Mr. Branders and brothers, also Mr. Peterson. Quite a few were of Finnish descent and among them were Branders, Petersons, Aho's, Bastilla and Hongisto.

Log drives were conducted on the Driftwood River. An incinerator was built for disposing of waste. Pulpwood was supplied to Woolings Mill, Connaught, and Abitibi Mill at Iroquois Falls. The dam supplied the mill and its people with electric power, and was enlarged later to supply the village of Monteith with power and light, it was 25 cycle.

A Demonstration Farm was built about 1914 for the purpose of teaching settlers the most suitable crops in this northern district. It was built on the south side of the railway, near the west bank of the river. It consisted of a large building, known as the Administration Building and a large barn and silo for cattle and feed. There was a house for the Superintendent. Nole, Frist Barn built by Milton Stover & Sons, Matheson. The first farm manager was Mr. John Whitton. The second farm manager was Mr. Harry Johnston.

Story of the 1916 Fire

by Mr. Charles Poulter who came to Monteith in 1912

It had been extremely dry for 11 or 12 weeks with no rain at all. The weather was also very warm.

The sky was hazy with smoke. Fires had been all around, but the fire had not struck until the 29th of July in the village (Driftwood) now Monteith.

The villagers had been afraid that it might come and on the morning of the 29th, Mr. Poulter had borrowed Mr. John Critchley's horse and stoneboat and with the help of a couple of neighbors he had hauled several barrels of water from the river. The river was quite a distance away.

Fire struck suddenly about 2 p.m. and burned fiercely until near 5 p.m. when it died down. It had burned all around the village, but all buildings save one were saved. This was a house built on the hill near the rocks and occupied by a Mr. Hoffa. The barn of Mr. Robert Kelso was also destroyed by the fire.

Credit for saving the homes of the village is given to Mr. J. Thompson, the manager of the Monteith Pulp and Lumber Company, who had a mill near the dam on the Driftwood River. The men of the village took the teams from the demonstration farm and hauled water in barrels on wagons.

Mr. Thompson and helpers kept the barrels filled with hoses from the river, and sparks and danger spots were kept dampened with water. His crew of men also poured water over piles of lumber near the mill.

While the village was saved the farms of nearby settlers did not fare so well. The family of Harry Campbell and his neighbor Mr. Mcmillan across the road were suffocated in a root house on Ayers place, along with Mrs. William McClinchy and her daughter Pearl.