

Gordon & Winifred Shearn

Pioneers & Citizens of Red Lake for 50 years

Gordon Shearn and Winifred (Coombs) Shearn were both born in Bristol, England on December 21, 1898 and December 31, 1901 respectively.

Gordon joined the Royal Naval Reserve in 1915 (by fabricating his age) and fought in the battle of Gallipoli in 1916. Having survived that, he was sent to France and was wounded in the left arm at the battle of the Somme on April 23, 1917. His stay at a Canadian Field Hospital may have sown the seeds of his decision to move to Canada upon his discharge. It was an adventure he said he preferred to spending the rest of his life in the Post Office in Bristol.



After several trips across the Atlantic and a series of jobs on farms and in lumber camps he read news of a gold rush. He traveled to Hudson, Ontario where he got himself hired to drive a dog team with supplies to prospectors in Red Lake. The story of that experience is documented in the Red Lake museum's archives entitled "An Early History of Red Lake". He arrived in February, 1926 and never left.

Over the years he worked variously on numerous mining properties including the Howey, Hasaga, Madsen (where he walked every day from Red Lake, and carried the mail), and the Cunningham property where the Campbell and Dickenson mines later developed, and where Balmertown/Golden now exists.

In 1932, Gordon returned to Bristol and married his sweetheart Win Coombs and they returned to the log house he built on the hill across from the present site of Green Airways.

Eventually, as the gold rush moved to the west end, they went along with it and established at Pipestone Narrows a store which included a Post Office and a pool table with an apartment upstairs.

Their only son and heir, Gordon James Mark (Jim), was born in 1936 but was delivered in Winnipeg due to the lack of road or a hospital in Red Lake. Jim graduated in Mining Engineering at Queen's in 1959, then became a Petroleum Engineer, and eventually a Patent Lawyer in Toronto.

As the Second World War loomed and the mines closed, the Shearns and most mining activity returned to Howey Bay for the duration. The war and the depression had a minor affect on Red Lake which was isolated from the rest of the world and where the government would buy whatever gold the town could produce.

At the end of the war, interest in mining revived and Gordon decided to stake some claims on property where he had worked in 1926. Unfortunately, it seemed George Campbell had the same idea and arrived the day before and staked what became the Campbell Mine. So Gordon went next door and staked claims which were sold to Brewis and White and later became the Dickenson Mine, now known as Goldcorp's Red lake Mine. Gordon continued his prospecting career and spent a lot of time and effort in East Bay where other seekers are still hopeful.

Gordon was a founding member of the Legion and was well know as a strong swimmer and an accomplished artist. Win was a member of the Legion Women's Auxiliary and active in church, charities and a very long standing bridge club which included Vivian Cook, Alice Browne, and Margaret McDougall.

Win died in 1971 and Gordon in 1977. Both are buried in Red Lake Cemetery.



Information submitted by Jim Shearn, son of Gordon and Winifred, on August 31, 2010.