

BOB GAMMON (1885-2010)

Some people came to this country to better their condition in life; others came for adventure. Bob belonged in the latter category. He says he never wanted to make money, only to live an outdoor life away from the so called civilization. Robert Edgar Gammon was born in Ipswich, Suffolk, England in 1885. His father was a coal wholesaler.

At the age of 15, Bob ran away from home and joined the artillery, being stationed in Gibraltar, Aden and Malta. On his return to England at the turn of the century, Bob waited only a week before he was off again, this time to America. The year was 1907. Out of the small nest egg and very small it was and which he had saved from his army pay, he paid the five pounds for fare from London to Chicago, including third class on the boat, in company with immigrants who were seasick for the entire ten days of the voyage.

When they reached Staten Island, the other immigrants were kicked around like cattle in a pen, but Bob, since he could speak English and was better dressed than the others was treated more considerately. As a matter of fact, two men, who or what they were he doesn't know, took him out, showed him around and put him on the first train for Chicago.

In Chicago, he lived with an uncle and aunt and three cousins who were good to him, but he soon became bored and decided to move on. Since he wanted to be a farmer, his uncle arranged for him to work for a Nebraska man whose wealth came from a system of renting a farm, working it to death, then moving on to another. He also bought and sold crops.

The farmer asked Bob what he knew and the boy replied "Nothing", but he must have answered in a way that indicated that he was ready to try anything, because the man said "You're just the boy I want", and proceeded to tell him to hitch up the horse and drive to town. Bob says, "I didn't know a horse from a mule but I hitched up and I got there."

On the farm he worked a sixteen hour day for \$25.00 a month, plus board and laundry and he learned a great deal. However he decided to move on after a terrible fight with the foreman, who swore to kill him, so with the \$65.00 he had saved he got as far as Spokane.

In Spokane, he survived for three weeks on what he could get in bars, where the

rule was that as long as you had a dirty glass in your hand you could eat as many of the sandwiches provided by the establishment as you wanted. Bob used to grab someone's dirty glass and wolf down as much as possible. The worst part was the lack of sleep. You could go into a hotel and sit down, but if you fell asleep you were prodded until you woke up.

One night he heard two men talking under a lamp post, and recognized their old country accent. He told them he was starving. One was a Welsh miner at Coeur D 'Alene, Idaho, who offered to pay his fare that far and bought him his first breakfast in weeks: a cup of coffee and a doughnut for 5cents. The Welshman told Bob to tell the manager of the English Hotel that he had sent him, but Bob felt he was too dirty to present himself. Also he had no luggage- it was still unredeemed at the station.

Once more he was penniless, and this time he wandered the streets all night in sub-zero weather, without an overcoat. From then on, he went to the mine office twice a day looking for work but none was available because of the current depression. Finally he got employment in a restaurant by saying that he could cook. He had never cooked in his life, but managed well enough until he was able to get work in the mine.

He worked for the winter, cleaned up his debts, and went to Wenatchee for a year. There he sat on the curb, chewing tobacco and whittling sticks waiting for someone to come down and hire him. After he was hired as a foreman on a fruit ranch, since he claimed to have been in the fruit business all his life, although in actual fact his experience was nil! When his boss told him to prune the Rome Beauties, he had to ask the workers what they were. Nevertheless his bluff worked one hundred percent and he earned \$60.00 per month, plus room and laundry, \$20.00 more than the men who worked under him.

In 1908 he decided to move to the Okanagan where an English neighbour of his was living in Summerland. After finding that Capt. Corday was completely disinterested in him, he proceeded by boat to Vernon, where he joined the B.C. Horse Regiment and went to summer camp.

He then broke horses and land for the Coldstream Ranch for a month or two. As well as hayfields and cattle, the ranch had hundreds of acres in young fruit, but he doesn't remember seeing any that was big enough to pick. Small orchards were also being started in Vernon, now that Lord Aberdeen had built a dam.

During his stay in the north end of the valley, Bob had several experiences which could not have occurred in a more settled country. Several other English boys, as well as Bob, were living in shacks near Nahun Landing, when one of them, Starky by name, a

cousin of Kinnard, the storekeeper, decided to cook Christmas dinner for all of them. One of the others, who had been out buying hooch for the occasion, arrives and annoyed Starkey to the point where he left the cabin and didn't come back. The next day Bob went to look for him because it was starting to snow and he was worried. He found him down the trail, frozen stiff, with his arms behind his head and his pipe in his mouth.

The next problem was the disposal of the body, since the closest churchyard was in Kelowna. There was no lumber for a coffin, so they tried to put the corpse in a large clothes hamper belonging to the storekeeper. When the legs stuck out, two neat blows of a hammer accommodated them to the shape of the hamper. They then flagged down a boat and Starkey was taken to Kelowna. Two years later, Starkey's mother came from Scotland, looked at her son's grave in the Kelowna churchyard and returned home!

In spite of the casual attitude towards such happenings, Bob says there was no real crime in the country. As assistant to Doddwell, the provincial policeman at Naramata for the short time when the railway was going through, he can recall no one but the odd drunk in the jail. There were two "blind pigs" (where liquor was sold illegally) in the village, and gambling went unchecked, to the enrichment of Doddwell, but nothing more serious seemed to have occurred.

Coming south from Vernon, Bob stayed in Summerland at the hotel and in the morning when the Chinaman insisted on "two dooly" for bed and breakfast, Bob who was broke, ended up being irritated, picked the man up by the pigtail, swung him around and threw him against the wall. Chased by several men, he ran down to the dock and jumped onto the deck of the "Maude Moore" just as it pulled out for Naramata. He heard no more about the assaulted man so he assumed he was okay.

He began taking freight down to O.K. Falls when the regular driver "went on a booze". At that time, the road from Penticton to O.K. Falls was so narrow and steep that two wagons could not pass' You left at six and got into Junction Ranch on the Green Mountain road by noon, then had to sleep at O.K. Falls (a 20 minute drive today) The hill on the road into Kaledan was so precipitous that the four horse wagon had to have a log tied to the rear axle to hold them back.

In those days, there were a lot of tough men in O.K. Falls. One day he was freighting whiskey in barrels to Fairview, when a dozen men surrounded him and demanded to buy some. Since they would have taken them anyway and probably beat he up, Bob immediately knocked a hole in a barrel, filled a five gallon coal oil can and sold it to them for \$5.00.

One time while packing food into Camp McKinney, Bob asked for a hotel room at Fairview (a very crowded wealthy gold town). The hotel manager asked "Can you fight for it?" To keep a room it was necessary to fight for it, in a country where there was only one policeman (Val Haynes' brother) for Fairview and district, and one between Penticton and Vernon, according to Bob.

Later he contracted to a man called Endicott in Naramata, planting orchards and clearing roads, sleeping in a barn at night. He was earning \$80.00 a month, which permitted him to live in Vernon in the winter, enjoying himself.

From 1912 to 1914, he worked as a chain man and transit man on the government hydrographical survey from McIntyre Bluff south to the border. In 1914 he was on a topographical survey along Deadman River, north of Kamloops, when in October, the engineer returned from a trip to civilization with the news that there was a war on. To a man, the camp abandoned everything but instruments and blankets and walked out the 80 miles in a snowstorm, in order to enlist; everyone, that is, but the Mexican cook who had disappeared as soon as he heard the news.

Bob joined "B" company of the Canadian Mounted Rifles in Vernon, later transferring to the Royal Artillery. In 1917, he married his childhood sweetheart, Hilda Morris, in England, and after the war tried for several months working at his uncle's business, which he had inherited, but he hated wearing a bowler and gloves, so he decided to return to this country.

The spirit of the women who followed their husbands to this country is exemplified by Bob's wife. When his family asked Bob how he thought Hilda would like it, she replied, "Of course I'll like it, why shouldn't I? Besides, it's my duty to go where my husband goes!"

Once back in Naramata in 1919, the Gammons lived in a shack until they bought an orchard part way up Arawana Road, from a Mrs. Bell. They sold it to E.M. Bomford and retired to Galliano Island on an army disability pension, but returned in 1961 to Naramata where they lived until their deaths.