

FISH CREEK PROVINCIAL PARK

The Willans Family

The southern Alberta foothills have been closely identified with cattle ranching since the late 19th century. The story of Norman Willans and his family is representative of the many ranches scattered throughout this area.

From England to Canada

Born in Rochdale, England, in 1870, Norman Willans and his brother Bernard came to Canada in 1886. After two years of study at Guelph Agricultural College, the brothers learned some of the necessary skills to make a life off the land.

Norman moved west to the Millarville District in 1890 and eight years later married Alice Maud Deane-Freeman. Together, they lived at the Anchordown Ranch near Millarville until 1901, when Norman was hired as a cattle buyer by P. Burns and Co. Ltd., and the family moved to Calgary.

Burning the candle at both ends

In 1910, Norman moved his family to the Fish Creek area and took over from Billy Bannister as the manager of Pat Burns' renowned Bow Valley Ranch. Eight years later, Norman and Alice purchased the land next to the Shannon Ranch and began a mixed farming operation while still working for cattle baron, Pat Burns. Norman's "commute" by horse followed pathways along Fish Creek from the homestead to the Bow Valley Ranch 13 kilometres away.

The Willans Beebow Ranch

Farming and ranching requires essential buildings to house families as well as livestock. Norman Willans built a log barn for his string of cow ponies and also constructed a cabin for his wife and children in Shannon Terrace. The Willans barn stood until 2016, when in the interest of

public safety it was demolished. Built from the straight white spruce trees that line the banks of Fish Creek, these buildings were a reminder of the rugged lifestyle of men and women who contributed to Alberta's farming and ranching heritage.



Group of Millarville, Alberta people, ca. 1900 - 1903
Glenbow Archives, NA-247-3

L-R back row: Justin Deane-Freeman, Bill Moseley,
Herbert (Specky) Anders

L-R front row: Mrs. Justin Deane-Freeman,
Cecil Douglass, Norman Willans, Miss Tillsley



For more information contact:

Fish Creek Provincial Park
15979 Bow Bottom Trail SE
Box 2780
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2M7
Phone: (403) 297-5293
Email: fishcreek@gov.ab.ca
Website: www.fish-creek.org



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