

The Clinton Museum

SITE #030102

GC1XHRZ

Written & Researched by Maggie Meekis

SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: Clinton, V0K 1K0
 Geocache Location: N 51°05.492'
 W 121°35.222'
 Accuracy: 5 meters
 Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing clues page
 UTM: East 0598950;
 North 5660952 10U
 Geocache altitude: 898 m./2,945 ft.
 Overall difficulty: 1
 Terrain difficulty: 1
 (1=easiest; 5=hardest)
 Date Established: 1892
 Ownership: Village of Clinton
 Access:

- Highway
- Year-round
- Vehicle accessible
- Located within the Village of Clinton.
- High visibility area, use stealth.



The Clinton Museum is housed in a former schoolhouse.

At the beginning of the Cariboo gold rush there were two paths to get into the Interior of the Province. Travelers could either brave the route along the Fraser River on the Cariboo Wagon Road or travel up the Harrison-Lillooet Trail. Either way, the road chosen went through “the Junction” at 47 Mile.

47 Mile House, later renamed the Clinton Hotel, was a favorite resting place for those heading for the gold in Barkerville. But the travelers required more than just a place to rest. A general store and a blacksmith were needed early on and by 1892, Clinton boasted shops, a bank, a telegraph office, a courthouse and the burgeoning town required a larger schoolhouse. Ed Norton was making bricks out of clay from the Clinton area and was given the contract to build the one-room school. He may not have been charging enough as his brick-building business closed in 1898, making the little brick

schoolhouse a unique rarity for Clinton. The one and only brick house, then and now.

At one time, the school sported a bell tower complete with a brass bell donated by Sir Richard McBride, a well-known provincial politician. The bell was later melted down for the “war effort” and the bell tower removed.

The brick building was used as a school and later, when the original courthouse burned down, a



Some of the items on display inside the museum.

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Clinton School, c 1915

substitute courthouse. When a trial was in session, the children were sent outside to play. When yet another larger school was built, the little brick building was used solely as a courthouse.

This little courthouse/schoolhouse was the site of the trial of Betty Coward. In September of 1910, near Vanderhoof, British Columbia, Betty Coward and her daughter Rose Dell arrived at a neighbor's house in a panic with a story about "an Indian with a grudge." This Indian had apparently murdered the poor woman's husband, Jim, in his sleep!

W.R. Dunwoody, the Provincial Police District Chief, was summoned from Fort George and began the investigation. He discovered that Jim and Betty Coward had only arrived from California the previous year and had later been joined by Rose, Betty's daughter from a previous

marriage. Within an hour Dunwoody determined that the vengeful Indian implicated by Betty Coward had an airtight alibi and Betty's story seemed a little loose.

In the course of his investigation, Dunwoody traveled through thirteen states and three provinces. In San Francisco he discovered that Betty Coward was actually Mrs. Dell. When questioned, Mr. Dell said, "She's a dangerous woman and has a hell of a temper. You mark my words; she'll commit a murder one day."

Betty was arrested and tried for the murder of her husband; her daughter Rose Dell was arrested for conspiracy, although the case was later dropped. The evidence collected by Dunwoody, including a life insurance policy taken out by Elizabeth Dell on Coward's life, ensured that the jury assembled at the Clinton Assize quickly came back with a guilty verdict against Betty Coward. She became the first woman in British Columbia to be sentenced to death. Forty-eight hours before the hanging her sentence was commuted to life in prison.

The little brick schoolhouse entered its next phase of usefulness by becoming a museum when, in May of 1956, the South Cariboo Museum and Historical Society opened its doors. In 1999 the museum also acquired and moved the then 88-year-old Provincial Government Stable, filling it with their ample collection of historical artifacts. The only building ever made out of Clinton bricks is not only historical itself, but today is filled with the history of the entire area.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

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- Kind, C. (2005). *Turn 'em North: Gold, Whiskey, Dance Hall Girls & the Law*. Calgary, AB: Self.
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