

## 3.0 Community History

Incorporated in 1892, Vernon has a rich history spanning from the settlement by Interior Salish peoples to the arrival of fur traders, ranchers, farmers and miners, all helping Vernon to grow into the diverse community it is today. Vernon has always been able to adapt to changing social, economic and environmental contexts, and this tradition of resilience will help the city adapt to the rapidly evolving world we will experience in the future.

### Interior Salish People

20,000 years ago, as the most recent ice age ended and the glaciers retreated, the Interior Salish people moved into the Okanagan Valley from the south. The area in and around today's city centre was a traditional winter gathering place. Pit house dwellings called "kekulis" were erected and used throughout the winter months. The Interior Salish people were a semi-nomadic people, travelling throughout the area hunting game, gathering



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berries and roots and fishing salmon. The

people moved from place to place in the North Okanagan with the seasons, following cycles of food sources.

Since the arrival of European fur traders in 1812, the Interior Salish people have continued to maintain their culture and identity. These people have had a role in all stages of change in the community and will continue to have an important role into the future.



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### Fur Trade

In 1812 the North West Company claimed the Okanagan Valley as part of their territory. By 1814, the Okanagan Valley was being used as a trade route from the Columbia north to Fort St. James. In 1821 the North West Company amalgamated with the Hudson Bay Company. The fur trade route through the Okanagan Valley remained actively used by the Hudson Bay Company until 1847.

### Mining

The Okanagan Valley travel routes became significant travel corridors following the discovery of gold in several locations in the interior, most notably in the Cariboo and Cherry Creek. In the 1850s, prospecting

occurred throughout the Okanagan Valley with little success, as significant commercially viable sources of precious metals were not found.

## Agriculture

Although gold mining did not prove viable in the Vernon area, those who travelled to and through the Okanagan Valley recognized the great agricultural opportunity afforded by the land and climate. People began arriving in the Vernon area to pursue agriculture and by the 1860s, permanent settlement was appearing in the area. With the gold rush in the interior, a strong market for beef was created resulting in the establishment of ranching operations in the area. Notable ranches from this era that can still be visited include the Coldstream Ranch and the O'Keefe Ranch. Ranching remains a significant component of agriculture in the community today.

Soon after ranching began, grain fields were established and by 1890, wheat had become the main agricultural crop in the area. Several roller mills were established for grinding wheat into flour, but with wheat production expanding on the prairies at the turn of the century, the small mills in Vernon were unable to compete and by 1920, all were closed.

The first fruit orchards were planted in 1892, but it was not until irrigation became available with construction of the Grey Canal in 1907 that the fruit industry became a major economic driver in Vernon. By the First World War, the Vernon area was one of the largest producers of fruit in the British Empire. In conjunction with the large orchards of the area, packing houses were also significant employers in the community.

By 1910, fruit and vegetable canning and dehydrating had become a major industrial employment sector in the area. As commercial vegetable farming became less economically viable for farmers in the 1950s, and the ability to transport fresh fruit and vegetables to larger production facilities was created, canneries and dehydrating facilities closed. The last of these facilities closed their doors in the 1960s.



## Early Transportation

From the fur trade trail, to paddle wheeler, to train and finally the highway, transportation has played a significant role in shaping the community. Trail and stage coach presented the only land access options for Vernon until the arrival of a spur line of the Canadian Pacific Railway from Sicamous to Okanagan Landing in 1892. Boat transportation had begun well before the arrival of the railway, but it was Canadian Pacific Railway that introduced paddle wheel lake boats to Okanagan Lake. The first paddle wheel boat, the SS Aberdeen, was launched May 22, 1893. The lake boats continued to transport people and freight up and down Okanagan Lake until 1936.



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## Army Camp



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In 1908, a militia unit of the Okanagan Mounted Rifles was authorized for Vernon. The militia's camp was established on Mission Hill, becoming Camp Vernon. In 1915, the Army officially established Camp Vernon as a training centre and a tent camp for 3,500 men. By 1916, seven thousand soldiers were being trained on Mission Hill and with a population of only three thousand, Vernon was dominated by this military presence. During World War I, an internment camp was established in Vernon. The camp was situated where Seaton High School stands today, and housed 400 internees for the duration of the war.



During World War II, Camp Vernon was again used as an infantry training centre and included a live ammunition course that simulated battle conditions. 24,000 men went through this course during the war. During this time Camp Vernon grew with the construction of several buildings, including the barrack huts that stand today.

Camp Vernon evolved in the years since World War II into a summer camp for cadets from across western Canada. Since being established as a cadet training centre in 1949, thousands of cadets have come to Vernon during the summer.