

Valley's "French Connection" goes back to 1873

By Maureen Curtis

Two of the largest ranches in the Nicola Valley, now owned by Gerard Guichon and his cousin Guy Rose, possess a heritage that goes back to 1873 when Joseph Guichon arrived in the Nicola Valley.

Born in Chemberry, Savoie, France in about 1843, Joseph came to B.C. via California (he walked across the Isthmus of Panama) in about 1864. After working as a prospector and a packer during the gold rush, he took up land near Savona on the Thompson River in 1868.

In 1873, he and his brother Pierre located in Mamette Lake area. Pierre died soon after. Joseph married in 1878

and the following year his son Lawrence was born at Keating near Victoria.

Selling out to Jean Rey and Louis Quinville in 1885, Joseph moved his family to the Chapperon Lake area, where Joseph Jr. was born. Guichon's elder brother Laurent was involved in the Chapperon operation for a time before selling out to Douglas Lake and moving to the Ladner area (which used to be called Port Guichon, by the way).

Joseph Guichon acquired the O'Roarke Ranch and Wheeler Mickle property and in 1887 purchased the Sullivan Place (now the Home Ranch). Then, in 1907, he bought the 320

acre site of the original Quilchena Hotel, which he rebuilt in 1908. In 1911, he added the nearby 11,000 acre Triangle Ranch.

In 1918, Joseph handed his extensive holding over to his children who formed the Guichon Cattle Co. Ltd. with Lawrence as president. The Mickle and Beaver Ranches were added in 1920 to bring the total holdings to about 50,000 acres.

Lawrence was on the first executive of the Nicola Stock Breeder's Association, helped initiate the Kamloops Bull Sale and was for many years, a director of the B.C. Beef Cattle Growers' Association. In 1953, the University of B.C. recognized his achievements by awarding him an honorary degree of Doctor of Science.

Lawrence died in April of 1963. His wife, Gertrude Bilodeau, had died in 1941.

Over the years, some members of the large family sold out to the others until the property was consolidated into two major holdings. The northern portion became the Gerard Guichon Ranch Ltd., operated by Lawrence's son Gerard and grandson Lawrence. The western remainder is owned by Guy Rose, son of Dr. Lawrence's sister, and is known as the Quilchena Cattle Co.

Gerard married Ruth Baillie, daughter of the Merritt blacksmith, 41 years ago, and the couple raised eight children.

In 1974, Gerard received the Order of Canada for his efforts in helping to form the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, for which he served as president, 1965-67. Guichon also served as president of the B.C. Cattlemen's Association in the 1960's and has been involved in many other organizations.

Gerard was eight when Joseph Guichon died and remembered him as a great enterpriser with tremendous faith in the country. Joseph's



Quilchena Cattle Co.'s Home Ranch was originally known as the Sullivan Place before it was purchased by Joseph Guichon in 1887. —Photo available at Herald Office.

brother Lawrence, he recalls, brought the first registered Hereford to the Nicola Valley in 1884. Herefords were soon appreciated for their resiliency and homing instinct. They don't graze in groups, and are therefore easier on the grass. Before that, ranchers mostly used short horns and some long horns brought up from California.

The Guichons continue to raise Herefords, occasionally buying cross-breed bulls from Beef Boosters in Alberta. In the interests of good record keeping for cross-breeding, Gerard is taking a correspondence course in computers.

Ranching is well suited to the Nicola Valley in Gerard's opinion, but he stresses the need for careful management of what is a very delicate environment. The valley is arid and will not bear overgrazing. He believes in multiple use of the land, as long as the co-operation between users works more than one way.

Gerard is not involved in government subsidies to the beef industry and cites the wasteful overpopulation that has occurred as a result of the European Common Market's attempt to stimulate agriculture.

"Marketing boards were designed to protect the family farm, but have ended up encouraging inefficiency instead," he says.

One of the results of farm income insurance that he sees is that it has allowed ranchers to run more cattle and overuse the range.

Despite the many years his family have ranched in the valley, Gerard says that he wouldn't have stayed if the government had insisted on running the Coquihalla Highway through his property as was originally planned. Several local ranchers hired an engineering consultant to come up with an alternate route that proved acceptable to the government (it was shorter). Guichon will still lose some of his summer grazing land.

"We have to learn to give and take and we have to do our homework in these matters," says Guichon.

Gerard's cousin, Guy Rose, was the son of a Vancouver policeman, but nevertheless enjoyed the summers he spent on the Guichon Ranch so much that he hired on as a cowboy. After graduating from the University of British Columbia with a degree in agriculture, Guy took a trip to Europe, during which he met the German girl who was to become his bride in 1955. He bought his section of

the ranch, now known as the Quilchena Cattle Co., in about 1958.

Guy has been very active in community functions. He has had two two-term stints as president of the Nicola Stockbreeders Association, and is presently the rancher representative with the B.C. Federation of Agricultural Research Organization.

Other community involvement include his chairing the building committee for the new Catholic Church Hall, his involvement with the Sacred Heart Parish Council, and his serving as director of B.C. Hydro for the last three years.

"There are better ways to make a living, but not quite as satisfying," Rose concludes after more than 30 years of

ranching.

"Like his cousin, Guy does not think society should subsidize him, just because he wants to ranch for a living. He criticizes U.S. President Ronald Reagan's Payment in Kind (PIK) program that he says, 'put more money in fewer hands.'"

Beef prices have been down and the ranching industry in trouble for some time, but Rose feels the solution is to get "smarter, leaner and meaner," and take advantage of technological advances in agriculture.

Rose thinks a small increase could turn things around, but there is great public resistance to price increases for beef. The general public doesn't remember that it only takes an average of



Quilchena Ranch, owned by Guy and Hilde Rose, above, has been in the family for more than 100 years. Hilde, a native of Germany, remembers how she coped without water or electricity when she came to Quilchena as a new bride (see story on ranch women). —Photo available at Herald Office.

eight minutes of work to buy a pound of beef, while it took half a day in the 1930's.

Quilchena Cattle Co. has undertaken an ambitious modernization

program towards becoming "leaner and meaner". This has included the installation of underground irrigation and the

Continued On 7C



Gerard Guichon, grandson of the original Joseph Guichon, received the Order of Canada in 1974 for his work in getting the Canadian Cattlemen's Association started. He was president of the Association 1965-67, and also served as president of the B.C. Cattlemen's Association. Gerard, with his son Laurie, farms the northern portion of the original Joseph Guichon Ranch. —Photo available at Herald Office.



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