

Lake Louise has own story to tell

ROB ALEXANDER BOW VALLEY

➔ The history of Lake Louise has been told many times over the years, but usually in small pieces, mentioned for its connection to railway building or Banff National Park or skiing or Swiss guides or explorers or tourism.

Rarely is its history considered as a whole and, given that, it would be easy to assume Lake Louise doesn't have much of a story to tell.

But to assume that would be wrong.

Based on a new book released recently by Banff-based Summerthought Publishing, Lake Louise has a story of its own and one worth telling at that.

Lake Louise: Past to Present, written by Summerthought publisher Andrew Hempstead, shares – as the title suggests – the entire story of Lake Louise from “past to present.”

This history and the book both begin with the Indigenous people who called the Rocky Mountains and Bow Valley home. While short, this section is a reminder that the history of Indigenous people in the Bow Valley region is long, predating explorers by 10,000 years.

And it was Indigenous people, after all, members of the Stoney-Nakoda First Nations, who guided Canadian Pacific Railway packer Tom Wilson to the lake in 1882. The Nakoda know the lake as the “lake of little fishes.” Wilson, who later became a Banff-based guide and outfitter, however, decided to call it “Emerald Lake” for its emerald-green waters. The lake was renamed in 1884 after Princess Louise Caroline Alberta.

It is with Wilson and the first tourists to the lake that the story of the Lake Louise we know today begins.

The region's future as a tourism centre was established in 1890 with construction of a 30 by 50 foot chalet at the edge of the lake. This modest chalet, which burned down in 1893, was replaced in various iterations of the Lake Louise

Chateau from a wooden hotel to the structure of today.

Along with the story of the lake and the chateau, Hempstead also included many smaller side stories, such as the tea houses, skiing, the Swiss guides, the railway station and tramway, development of the road to the lake and the burgeoning tourism industry with the construction of other hotels like Deer Lodge, that have helped to make the region unique.

And along with those smaller stories and the more easily recognizable parts of the history there are a few surprises, such as the role Lake Louise played – along with Patricia Lake in Jasper – in experiments during the Second World War to build a warship constructed from ice.

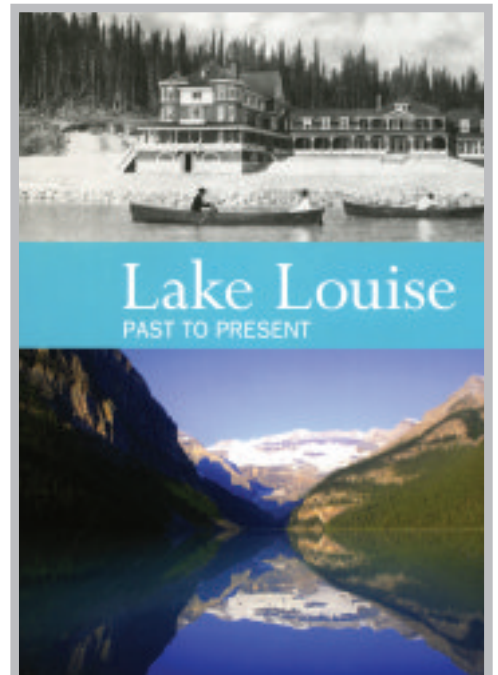
Along with a 22-page section that shows how Lake Louise has been featured in art and photography over the years, Hempstead also included some surprises among the many photographs.

While many of the usual images are there, namely the famous view of the lake at dawn looking west towards Victoria Glacier, Hempstead added a number of rare or unknown photographs. One such image is a photograph taken on July 3, 1924 of guests gathered on the lawn under umbrellas watching the wooden section of the Chateau burn.

I must admit to being surprised by this book. On first glance – and yes, never judge a book by its cover – I didn't expect much, thinking it would be a light and fluffy tourist-trade book with little substance.

Instead, it's a relatively small book at 128 pages with a great deal to say, making it a valuable and welcome addition to the numerous books about the Rocky Mountain and the Bow Valley.

I learned more about Lake Louise and its region from this detailed and interesting book than from any other single source. One small example of this is the meaning of Laggan, Gaelic for “low place,” one of the hamlet's previous names,



along with Holt City.

Much like Exshaw, which is overshadowed by Canmore, Lake Louise sits in Banff's shadow; however, *Lake Louise: Past to Present* does much to bring this Bow Valley community out into the light on its own terms.

The 128-page *Lake Louise: Past to Present* by Andrew Hempstead is available for \$19.95.

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