

Rudkin Family

Wilfred John (Jack) Rudkin

- Wilfred John (Jack) Rudkin was born on April 27th, 1905 in Leicester, England.
- He had fond memories of his birthplace, however, a sense of adventure led him to spend most of his over 90 years of life in Canada.
- Rudkin heard of the 1926 gold rush to Red Lake while he was visiting a travel office in Edinburgh, Scotland.
- At the time, however, he was determined to go to the mines of the South Porcupine district of northern Ontario.
- With a mixture of apprehension and excitement, Rudkin sailed from England on the Canadian Pacific Line ship, the *S.S. Montrose*. He arrived in Quebec on May 26th, 1926, exactly one month after his 21st birthday.
- "I did not take the travel office manager's advice to go to Red Lake until February 1935 when I arrived via a Canadian Airways Junkers aircraft from Hudson," Rudkin recalled.
- A job as a hoist operator at the Howey Gold Mines awaited him.
- After meeting Hector Hodgins, the chief hoistman, Rudkin underwent a medical by the mine physician, Dr. Thomas Goodison. "I received an unpleasant injection which almost crippled my arm for a week. There were no deductions for OHIP, income tax, or unemployment insurance, but we did have deducted the sum of one dollar per month which covered the services of the physician," Rudkin said.
- Rudkin noted that during this time, Howey Mines' wages ranged from 53 cents to 75 cents per hour.
- During his first weeks in Red Lake, Rudkin lived in the mine bunkhouse.
- He had vivid memories of the conditions in town at the time: "I knew from my experiences in Porcupine and other camps Red Lake would be primitive, yet I did not know how primitive it really was. Sanitation seemed an afterthought; there was no running water, except at the mine. The townsite was unorganized territory—that is, except for whatever the Howey wished to organize. There was a feeling of isolation, made all the more acute during freeze-up and break-up when transportation of all kinds was at a standstill. There were few streets, if one was optimistic enough to call them that. After a bit of rain they became very muddy. It was a common sight to see ladies in long dresses wearing knee-high rubber boots, with shoes in one hand and a flashlight in the other, on their way to visit friends or attend a dance."
- Despite his full-time work as a hoist operator at the Howey Gold Mines, Rudkin was devoted to community organizing.
- Rudkin was a founder of a variety of social vehicles in town, including the "Men's Club", which was Red Lake's first service organization. It was established by Rudkin and teachers Dalton Jordan, James Cawley and Ronald Whitely. Speakers from the "outside" were brought in and banquets and dances were held periodically. "The club became an important part of our social life. As we were a very isolated community, it was necessary to make our own entertainment. I took part in debates and always wished to see some effort made to bring children to the fore," remembered Rudkin.
- When Rudkin became president of the Men's Club in the 1930s he suggested they work toward a sports day on July 1st. "The whole town got behind the program, which included sports for all the children. Every child got a prize no matter how they fared in the competition, as well as all the drinks and ice cream they could absorb." Rudkin was pleasantly surprised by the team spirit. "Once the community knew what we had in mind, the response was beyond anything I had expected; money and volunteers came in plentiful supply." They also made the unprecedented gesture of inviting aboriginal children from all of the outlying camps to partake in the day's activities. Adult sports, mining and boating competitions, an evening dance and yet more for children were added to the program the following year. As he looked back on it 60 years later, Rudkin said proudly "I'll bet any of the children in Red Lake at that time will remember the great day everyone had."
- In 1935, Rudkin and his friends, Cawley and Whitely, started the first locally-produced and published news medium in the Red Lake District. The first issue of "The Gold Vein" newspaper was produced on a mimeograph machine and consisted of a sheet printed on both sides. Its motto, of course, was "it assays high." The first run produced 300-400 copies.
- Rudkin and Cawley enjoyed writing, mostly in verse, and even had some of their Red Lake efforts published in *The Toronto Star*.

- Eventually the demand on their spare time of producing a newspaper became too much for the trio. Rudkin was working seven days per week and trying to spend time with Ruby and their sons, so he chose to give up the venture.
- By 1937 a radio-phone communication system was installed. A flurry of publicity was accorded to the event which culminated in a Red Lake party headed by mine president John E. (Jack) Hammell, who spoke directly over the air waves with the Premier. Rudkin had a part in it too, as he was requested to blow the Howey Mine whistle to open the broadcast.
- Rudkin happened to be operating the Howey Mines' hoist in 1941 when an underground collapse spelled the demise of the mine.
- After the mine's closure, he and his family left the area to return to South Porcupine, Ontario.
- After many years together, Jack lost his wife Ruby to cancer in August 1973.
- Jack found love again when he married his late wife's cousin Catherine Urquhart (who had never previously married) in Edinburgh, Scotland. They felt privileged to have enjoyed 21 happy years together. She was with Jack at the end.
- In 1988, Rudkin returned for a visit to Red Lake and was effusive in his praise for how the community had evolved, noting that the town "is no longer the crude, unorganized place that I first saw, but a modern, bustling, established district. Red Lake was unique as a mining camp and I do not believe it will ever be duplicated."
- Rudkin spent his remaining years researching his genealogy and taking in stride the infirmities of advanced age. He noted, "My fingers, all ten of them, have developed some stubborn idea of their own. My eyes, like everything else, are worn out. Can't grumble, though, for they served me well for 90 years. Oh well, as long as I don't go off the rails!" Rudkin never did.
- "Jack" Rudkin died at nearly 91 on February 6th, 1997 from breast lymphoma at South Porcupine, Ontario.
- His second wife, Catherine, died in October 2002, also in her 91st year. She was ill only one day and died in her own home. Her remains joined those of Jack and Ruby in South Porcupine Cemetery.

Robina (Ruby) Rudkin (nee Longmuir)

- Robina (Ruby) was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on August 31st, 1907.
- She was very young when her mother died.
- At that time, Ruby went to live with her great-aunt and family, the Urquharts.
- In her youth, she was interested in amateur dramatics.
- During the years of the First World War, Ruby also worked with the Red Cross Society and Girl Guides.
- She received her education in Edinburgh.
- After completing school, Ruby worked in a printing establishment until she immigrated to Canada in 1931.
- She sailed aboard the Canadian Pacific Line ship, the *S.S. Duchess of Bedford*.
- When the ship docked in Quebec, Ruby quickly got on a train to travel to meet her soon-to-be husband, Jack, in Ottawa, Ontario.
- On the day of her wedding in 1931, Ruby had only been in Canada for *one* day, and most of that time had been spent travelling by train.
- She married Jack on May 3rd, 1931.
- Ruby was initially very homesick for Scotland, and in 1933 made a visit back.
- She returned to Canada on the *S.S. Duchess of Bedford*, the same ship on which she had first come to Canada.
- She arrived in Quebec on November 18th, 1933.
- Ruby joined her husband in Red Lake in 1935.
- Ruby was an avid bridge player. "Wherever she lived, Ruby would always find or start a bridge club. Red Lake was no exception, and she and her good friend Helen Meadowcroft had a strong ladies bridge group going within a short time after Ruby's arrival in the north. In her later years, she was an active member of local [South Porcupine, Ontario] curling club associations," Rudkin wrote.
- Ruby died of cancer on August 25th, 1973, just six days before her 66th birthday, in South Porcupine, Ontario.

The Couple

- Jack and Ruby were married in a Lutheran church manse in Ottawa, Ontario, on May 3rd, 1931.
- The Rudkins had met seven years prior in Jack's family home.
- They corresponded regularly after Jack came to Canada in 1926. Ruby came nearly five years later in 1931.
- They lived in South Porcupine, Ontario before moving to Red Lake in 1935.
- Once Ruby and their infant son, Michael, arrived in Red Lake, they were able to obtain a small house in town.
- These pioneering years held one great tragedy for the Rudkins. Their Red Lake-born son, Ian, died of whooping cough in August 1937, not even a year after his birth.
- The Rudkins left Red Lake to return to South Porcupine, Ontario after the closing of the Howey Mine in 1941.
- Both are buried in South Porcupine Cemetery.

Children

Michael

- Michael was an infant when he first arrived in Red Lake with his mother Ruby.
- He began his elementary education in Red Lake, went on to attend university, and eventually retired as vice-president of the Federal Business Development Bank.

Ian William

- Ian was born in Red Lake in September 1936.
- He contracted internal dysentery following a siege of whooping cough. When he suddenly went into convulsions, Dr. Thomas Goodison had hastily arranged for an aircraft to transport the child and his distraught parents to hospital in Kenora.
- Two days later, he died on an aircraft on a mercy flight between Red Lake and Kenora on August 4th, 1937, just over one month before his first birthday.
- He is buried in Kenora's Lake of the Woods Cemetery.