

# Introduction: Princeton and the Traditional Music Festival

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Princeton is a unique community located in the western Okanagan region of the interior plateau of British Columbia, just north of the border with the U.S.A. The town was founded in the mid-nineteenth century as a small commercial centre in an area newly opened up for farming and ranching. Ranching is still a significant contributor to the local economy, and logging is currently one of the town's economic mainstays, with full-time jobs provided by the nearby Weyerhaeuser mill.

The town really began to flourish with the discovery of gold, coal and copper in the surrounding areas during the late nineteenth century. It also became the junction of the Vancouver, Victoria and Eastern Railway and the Kettle Valley Railway, although its importance as a railway centre proved short-lived. The exploitation of the local mineral deposits in the early years of the twentieth century brought more people to the town, as did the subsequent emergence of the logging industry. Each new group of arrivals brought with it a musical culture. That musical heritage was first explored by Phil Thomas in the mid-nineteen sixties; copies of his collection of tape-recordings were deposited in the Aural History Archives in Victoria.

Evidence of Princeton's varied cultural heritage was also reflected in print, particularly in local newspapers dating back to the end of the nineteenth century. The Princeton Museum contains print archives, including newspaper collections, and those primary sources have been explored during the last six years by Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat.

Jon and Rika are the founders of the Princeton Traditional Music Society and have been central to the organisation of the Traditional Music Festival since 2007. They have been singing together for over thirty-five years. Their repertoire ranges from sea shanties and traditional ballads to logging and mining songs. Their particular love is the songs of B.C. and they have discovered songs in local newspapers dating as far back as 1900.

Since becoming residents of Princeton Jon and Rika have mounted several concerts to publicize the material they have found in the archives, and have broadcast several programs on the same topic on C.B.C. Radio's show *North by Northwest*. They have also released a CD, *Now It's Called Princeton: Songs and Poems from the Upper Similkameen*, which contains 27 Similkameen songs and poems. They have also just recently published a book, *Dead Horse on the Tulameen: Settler Verse from B.C.'s Similkameen Valley*, that contains over 150 of these songs and poems as well as historical background and photographs.

The First Annual Princeton Traditional Music Festival was held in August 2008, but it had been preceded by a trial run on a smaller scale the previous year. In the following pages you will find Jon Bartlett's take on the aims and achievements of the Festival, followed by a section devoted to each of the festivals that have been held so far, including the important but unnumbered experiment in 2007. These seven sections are followed by a short discussion of the Festival's workshops and their themes, since in many ways the workshops are the heart of a folk festival. Then comes an attempt to list the websites of all the artists who have been involved with the festival from its early days, plus some information on a selection of CDs by those artists. Finally we have longer reviews of Jon and Rika's CD *Now It's Called Princeton* and book *Dead Horse on the Tulameen*.

When Jon and Rika conceived the idea of the Princeton Festival they first thought of it as a forum in which the local community as well as invited guests and other visitors could experience the rediscovered local (and regional) musical traditions. Initially, then, they intended to choose performers on the basis of their knowledge of the southern Okanagan's musical heritage: fiddle tunes and songs about mining, logging and ranching. In getting it going, however, they drew on their musical friends and acquaintances from Greater Vancouver (they had previously lived in New Westminster and had been active members of Vancouver folk clubs). And the word spread to other musicians along the coast of British Columbia and even down into Washington State.

The result of this influx of musicians from far and wide was a festival that was broader in musical scope than Jon and Rika had first envisaged. Since then its geographical compass has expanded even further, to northern B.C., the Canadian north, the Prairies, and even Newfoundland, although the folk music of the southern B.C. coast and interior remains its primary focus. The Princeton Traditional Music Festival is thus a regional festival rather than a purely local one, a festival that aims to celebrate the songs and musical traditions of southern British Columbia. It has become apparent that those traditions are at once unique and diverse.