

History

Quesnel has a deep history in British Columbia. This history has likely contributed to the relative stability of the community over the last decades. First Nations occupied the site of modern Quesnel for thousands of years before European explorers arrived. The fur trade brought the nucleus of European settlement, and in 1862 the colonial government reserved land at the junction of the Quesnel and Fraser Rivers. During the Cariboo Gold Rush, Quesnel was such a centre of importance that political analysts of the day predicted it would be named the capital of British Columbia. By 1865, there were 100 white people, and 100 “Celestials”, as the Chinese were known, living at the junction of the rivers. The First Nations population at the time is unknown, but substantial. The population was mostly transient, however, and Quesnel did not vary much in size in the early years. Other centres such as Barkerville were larger and benefited more from the mining industry, while Quesnel became an important fur depot for the Hudson’s Bay Company. The coming of the railway had a great impact on Quesnel, which was located in the mainstream of early traffic. Thousands of people were moving to the newly advertised areas north of Quesnel. The arrival of the railway also made possible the opening of other areas of mining. Heavy equipment could be brought in by rail, making quartz mining feasible. In the 1920s, deposits of coal, oil, scheelite, diatomite, and even platinum were found. In 1928, the municipality of the Village of Quesnel was formed. With the coming of the depression, there was another influx of people—this time unemployed—hoping to strike it rich. The beginning of gold quartz mining in Wells, 74km east of Quesnel, brought another round of prosperity to Quesnel as a distribution centre for the mines. Quesnel continued to prosper through the Second World War because of the infant forest products industry. Quesnel birch was ideal for use in plywood that Mosquito bomber aircrafts were built with. After the Second World War, the role of the forest products industry became even more important to the economy of Quesnel.

For more information on the rich history of the Quesnel and area, please visit the Quesnel and District Archives and Museum at 705 Carson Ave in Lebourdais Park or online at <http://www.city.quesnel.bc.ca/Museum2004/index.aasp>

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