

# Thomas Ellis, Penticton Pioneer



*Ellis homestead*

Thomas Ellis first saw the Okanagan Valley in May of 1865. He was looking for land that could be farmed and ranched and what he saw in the land lying between Okanagan and Skaha lakes was exactly suited to his needs. He was impressed with the bunchgrass forage and the abundance of water from lakes, rivers and springs. The warm climate would be suitable for orchards as well.

Ellis worked for several months clearing trail in the Kootenays before he returned to Penticton for good. He chose to locate his homestead on the site of present day Windsor Park. After he built a modest home, Ellis diverted water from Penticton Creek to furnish drinking water for his cattle and for household use. With his new home taking shape, Ellis returned to his native Ireland to marry his fiancé, Wilhelmina Wade.



*Studio portrait of  
Thomas Ellis*

They married in February of 1873. Eventually, Tom and Wilhelmina had nine children together.

For the Ellis family, life was full of hard work that came with tangible rewards. A small orchard and garden provided much of their food, while cattle on the hoof furnished meat. The Ellis's kept a generous table and their home was a frequent stopping place for travellers passing through the area. He was

on excellent terms with the local First Peoples whose main village was nearby. Ellis employed many native men and some became cattle ranchers in their own right.

As a successful rancher, Tom Ellis had a number of employees. His reputation was that of a hard taskmaster with no tolerance for idleness, but who provided excellent accommodations and meals for his employees. Many stayed with him for years, and included a number of men who later became prominent figures in the growing settlement of Penticton. At its height, his ranch had almost 20,000 head of cattle, most of them bearing his famous "69" brand. In 1905, Thomas Ellis sold his property to the Southern Okanagan Land Company, which had been recently founded by the Shatford brothers, two other prominent local pioneers. Shortly after, Ellis moved to Victoria where he died in 1918. **E**

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