

# TELLING OUR STORIES

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*Above, View from the Monkman Pass Trail, 1941. SPRA 399.09.46. For other photographs from the Carlisle family photograph album, see page 12.*

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## Would you like to receive this newsletter four times a year?

It's free when you are a member of the South Peace Regional Archives Society. See the Membership Form on the back of the newsletter.

February 18, 2011

Dear Members & Supporters;

This issue of "Telling Our Stories" focuses on memories of the Town/City of Grande Prairie and on the enormous impact that community organizations have on our lives, both in the past and the present.

Our featured collection is the HIV North Society fonds, which was processed with the help of an Access to Holdings Grant from the Archives Society of Alberta. Part of the requirement for the grant is that we publicize the work that we have done.

Guest writers are Betty Welter, Gord Percy, and Dorothy Patterson Hall, who was the daughter of local lawyer and judge, D.W. Patterson. Mr. Patterson was also the mayor of Grande Prairie from 1921-1923. Gord Percy was born in the log Kathryn Prittie hospital and worked at CFGP from the age of 16 until his retirement in 1990, so his story of watching Grande Prairie grow is first-hand. Betty Welter lived outside of town at Flying Shot Lake but remembers the town vividly.

Our featured photograph collection is the Carlisle family album, which was donated in 2010 by Dr. Jim Carlisle and Mary Jean & Jack Freebury. We are so thrilled when original material of this quality and extent can be added to the holdings of the archives.

Leslie's article about digitization is an amusing reflection on why archives digitize material, and why we don't scan everything in our collection.

Members are a very important part of the South Peace Regional Archives Society. Thanks for all the membership renewal forms we have received and for your support of this archives. Hope to see you at our Annual General Meeting on Saturday, March 12!

Sincerely,  
Mary Nutting, Archivist  
South Peace Regional Archives

## TELLING OUR STORIES

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The purpose of the SPRA Society is to promote and encourage the appreciation and study of the history of the south Peace River Country by acquiring, preserving and making accessible to the public, records in any format which reflect the history of this area.

# The Impact of Community Organizations

*by Mary Nutting, Archivist*

Today, as in the past, community organizations contribute a great deal to the economic, cultural and social life of any community. To document the history of the South Peace, SPRA archives the records of many community organizations. Following are a few examples of the collections we have that document what volunteers in our community used to do, and still do. These collections are just a drop in the bucket. If you know of any more that need to be preserved, please direct them to the archives!

Community organizations provided many services. We have the records of several Mutual Telephone Companies (North Western, West Sexsmith, Wanham, South Bear Lake, Grande Prairie, and Beaverlodge), and Rural Electrification Associations (Bear Hill and Smoky West) which organized telephone and electrical services before AGT and Alberta Power took over. Community clubs also ran the local halls so they would have a place to meet, e.g. Bay Tree Community Club, North Kleskun Community Assoc., Many Springs (Buffalo Lakes) Community Club, Eaglesham Cultural Society, Crystal Creek Community Assoc., Hermit Lake Community Assoc., Hinton Trail Community Hall Assoc., Beaverlodge Community Centre, and the Goodwin Social Club.

Then there were the farm organizations, like the United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta. We have the records of the Kleskun Hill, Sexsmith, Canuck and Birchview Locals, as well as other farm organizations such as the Sexsmith United Grain Growers Local, the Lake Saskatoon Agricultural Society, and the Peace Country Classic Agri-Show. One unusual farm group was the Hay Lake Bull Association, which brought in registered government bulls (shared by all the members) to improve the quality of their farm stock.

Another common category was the Health Services organizations. We have the Wanham and the Tangent Municipal Nursing Associations, the Wanham Red Cross, the QE II Hospital Auxiliary, and the Heart Healthy Support Group.

Closely connected to the health of the community were the women's organizations. Our collection includes the records of several Women's Institutes, two chapters of the IODE (Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire), two chapters of the Order of the Royal Purple Lodge, the "Just Us" Club from Glen Leslie, the Dimsdale Women's Community Circle, and the Grande Prairie Women's Residence Assoc. which started Odyssey House. Of course, for pure entertainment, there was the Sweet Adelines.

We also have the records of several children's clubs, such as the Red Willow Basketball Team, the Lake Lite CGIT, the Honey Bees CGIT, and the Trum-peter Swan Boy Scouts Troop.

An interesting category in our holdings is the military clubs: Legion of Frontiersmen, Royal Canadian Legion and Legion Auxiliaries, Veterans Volunteer Reserve, Royal Canadian Army Cadets, and a Navy Cadets and Wrenettes photo album.

In our business records, we have only three co-operatives, although this was once a common way to combine resources: the Ridgevalley Co-operative Assoc. which ran a Cheese Factory, the Eaglesham Consumers Co-op, and a few records belonging to the Goodwin Co-op Store.

I could go on and on—there are cultural and service organizations, business and church groups, ladies aids, cemetery associations, sports and hobby groups, school districts and Home & School Associations, historical societies, and museums. All of these organizations make community life richer.

One of our newer collections is the records of the HIV North Society, which was formed in 1987 to provide leadership in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Their goal was to bring all individuals and communities in Alberta's Peace Country together to eliminate the harm caused by HIV. This is an excellent example of a community organization. To read more, just turn the page.

# Feature fonds: HIV North Society aka South Peace AIDS Council

**HIV North Society fonds. -- 1987-2006. – 1.16 m of textual records, 69 photographic images, and 3 video cassettes.**

## *Agency History*

In July 1987, the Medical Officer of Health at the South Peace Health Unit invited representatives from various health services and educational institutions, the ministerial association and the Peace Gay Association to meet with speakers from the Edmonton AIDS Network to discuss the formation of a "Community Information and Education Committee on AIDS". A few months later, on October 8, 1987, a press release announced the formation of the South Peace AIDS Council. The founding individuals and organizations were Lorne Radbourne, representing the School Districts in the Grande Prairie area; Gordon Pellerin, Peace Gay Association; Carol Hayes, Queen Elizabeth II Hospital; Ron McDonald, Alberta Social Services; Norma Jackson, Alberta Alcohol & Drug Abuse Commission; Dr. Margaret Kirwan, Grande Prairie Physicians; Alice Tizzard, Grande Prairie Regional College; and Dr. Hilary Wynters, South Peace Health Unit.

To accomplish their goal of bringing all individuals and communities in Alberta's Peace Country together to eliminate the harm caused by HIV, this group had the following objectives:

1. to establish and maintain a council in the South Peace area focusing on AIDS
2. to promote community awareness and education with respect to AIDS, particularly accurate information regarding prevention, symptoms, diagnosis and transmission
3. to promote financial, emotional, and personal care support services in the community for individuals/family/friends affected by AIDS
4. to liaise with other local/provincial/national organizations involved with or interested in AIDS
5. to promote research on AIDS
6. to promote fund-raising to meet the above objectives.

The initial mandate of the Council was to serve the Mistahia Health Region, but in 2002 the boundary was expanded to include the entire Peace Health Region, a large geographical area containing many small towns and rural communities, with the regional centre being the City of Grande Prairie. It was at this time that the name was changed to HIV North Society to reflect the expanded region and the emphasis on the prevention of the spread of the HIV virus.

The vision of the HIV North Society is that "all individuals and communities in Alberta's Peace Country will have the ability, capacity, and inspiration to eliminate the harm caused by HIV", and their mission is that "through awareness, prevention, education and advocacy, HIV North supports community based responses and provides leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS."

In order to carry out their mandate, HIV North strives to bring the issues of HIV and AIDS to the attention of the public. This is done through making sure their activities and the issues around HIV/AIDS are



covered by local media; putting on promotional events each year, and running summer programs on the streets of Grande Prairie and at community events throughout the Peace Country.

The primary task for HIV North is to provide educational material and sessions to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. The Society coordinates a Community Care Team with representation from local agencies who want to stay informed about HIV/AIDS issues. Staff and volunteers offer information to individuals and other agencies such as schools, colleges, Home Care, Child Welfare Workers, Daycares, Red Cross, businesses and employees, the Northern Addictions Center, the Young Offenders Center, and Aboriginal Communities. All of this is managed by the Executive Director who oversees all events, programs and funding; and the Executive Assistant who assists with the administrative duties.

HIV North also becomes involved in short and long-term projects such as Focus Group Interviews, the Non-Prescription Needle Use program, a study on Women and AIDS, the Blue Streaks poetry publication, and a video presentation called "Should I Wear Pants Today?", which talks about the personal decisions we make every day, and the difference between decisions which are inconsequential (such as "Should I wear pants today?") and those that have a long-term effect on our lives.

HIV North is a member of the Alberta Community Council on HIV (ACCH), which is composed of representatives from all of Alberta's AIDS service organizations, including the AIDS Network of Edmonton and the Feather of Hope Aboriginal AIDS Prevention Society. As a member of ACCH, the South Peace AIDS Council has a partnership agreement with Alberta Health and Health Canada. It is also a member of the Canadian AIDS Society.

### *Scope and Content*

The fonds consists of records related to the operations of the South Peace AIDS Council and the HIV North Society: executive records including by-laws and minutes of meetings; educational material, records and photographs from events such as the AIDS Walk and summer programs; news clippings detailing the local attitudes and response to AIDS issues; subject files from the administration of the organization showing funding, planning and promotional activities, policies, presentation materials, and statistics; project files regarding short-term and long-term projects supported by the society; and relationships with associated organizations at the local, provincial and national level. The video recordings are the full interview with Marlo Cottrell, who grew up in Grande Prairie, and the edited, final copy of "Should I Wear Pants Today?"

### *Notes:*

The Agency history was based on "South Peace AIDS Council Overview, a document produced by the society ca. 1995, and information taken from the HIV North Society website.

**This project has been supported by a grant from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation through the Archives Society of Alberta. We also acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through Library and Archives Canada, and administered by the Canadian Council of Archives.**

# Growing Up in Grande Prairie in the 1930s

*by Dorothy Patterson Hall*

Mrs. Annie Smart, educated in England, was a very diminutive woman, and one of the most unselfish citizens of our town. Her husband ran the “five and dime store” where Annie helped out as needed. She gave piano lessons, and played organ in the Anglican church. They had three daughters: Jean, Audrey and Pat.

Most memorable was Mrs. Smart’s involvement with the annual music festival. She and her fellow piano teacher, Herb Vaughn, pretty much “ran” the festival, although I believe it was founded by Mr. A.E. Galway. Mrs. Smart provided leadership for school choirs for many years, entering the festival, often with excellent results. No remuneration was given nor would have been accepted. Festivals were tradition in her homeland, and she wanted to establish the same in this community.

A flaming red-headed dance teacher, Valerie Elwood, further advanced culture into our lives. She introduced ballet and tap dancing to aspiring students, and annually produced a beautiful dance revue presented in the old Capitol Theatre. These events came to an end in 1945 when Valerie married my cousin, George Patterson, and moved to Montreal.

The four O’Brien boys were a decade or two older than I, but their exploits in the 30s were legendary. Herb, Hugh, Gurth and Eric were daredevils, from riding bikes on the outer planks of the trestle bridge, to landing a small plane on main street. They loved the Wapiti and “the bush” in general. One December, Gurth, who had been at school in Vancouver, got off the train in Jasper and walked home to Grande Prairie following the rivers. He was about 14 years of age. Sadly, and before their time, accidents took the lives of Dr. Gurth in a plane, and Herb in an automobile. Their father, Dr. L.J. O’Brien, was a wonderful, kindly gentleman, who delivered many South Peace babies.

The late Ed Given told a story about his father George, who owned a fine farm near DeBolt. He had purchased an excellent set of horse collars and had them inscribed with his initials. Their dog gave warning one night, and in the morning the new horse collars were gone. Next morning Mr. Given saw his neighbour doing road work, so he strolled over to investigate. He found his missing collars on the neighbour’s team. The theft was reported to the RCMP and the neighbour fined \$75. Unsurprisingly, the neighbour had no money, so Mr. Given paid the fine and re-claimed his property.

There were many such incidents during the great depression. My father, a lawyer, was commissioned to collect rent money from a woman with an itinerant husband and a large family. Father was unsuccessful, but he gave the expectant mother \$50 so she could have her baby in the hospital.

Grace Mensinger and her family came from Vulcan in ‘37. She and her sister, Beverly opened a dress shop they named “Beverly’s”. They realized there was no place for out-of-towners to visit a bathroom so they fixed up a suitable place with an easy chair and some books, for which the ladies were very grateful. Marjorie Mensinger Given remembers this event, as did Georgina Given Collins remember the horse collar incident.

Few homes were built during the depression so, as a result, children gathered on vacant lots for ball games in summer and skating in winter. My mother and others helped build the rink by carrying out their used wash water to the nearest vacant lot on Monday morning.

The 1930s were tough times for our parents but, in my view, we children, in our homemade clothes and wash water skating rinks to play on, had as much fun as the relatively affluent children of today.

# Scenes of Grande Prairie in the 1930s

*by an unknown photographer*

*The late Miss Isabel Campbell had in her possession a collection of 102 unidentified glass negatives, taken by an unknown photographer in 1936-1937. They had been passed on to Miss Campbell by Gerald Carveth, president of the Old Timers Association. Isabel passed them on to Paul Pivert to make copy negatives, and Paul passed them on to the archives after her death in 1998.*



*Clockwise from above left: exterior of Donald Hotel, the old Capitol Theatre, the interior of Donald Hotel, and the Corona Hotel being destroyed by fire. (SPRA 032.03.01.04, 07,08,15)*



# Explore the History of Bear Creek

*by Mary Nutting*

The best way to explore the history of Bear Creek is by foot along the Muskoseepi Park Trail. Start from the parking lot at the top of Borstad Hill, on 105th Avenue and 104th Street, just south of the Bear Creek Spillway. The hill is named after Mr. Elmer Borstad, the MLA who pressured the Alberta Government to fund the beautiful park system you see below.

Before settlement, Muskawaseepe (translated Bear River) wound its circuitous course through the valley. These were the Flats where the First Nations gathered for the Spring Fish run. There were lots of different kinds of fish then, and the area was filled with willows and scrub brush, not the green expanse you see today. The creek here is a gentle curve from the spillway to 100th Avenue, but if you compare it to the map on the previous page, you will see that originally it wound back and forth. The spillway and reservoir were built to provide a water supply in 1947, and the creek was straightened in the 1970s.

It was around this valley that the first settlement occurred. To the north, W.H. Smith & Sons set up their log cabin, barns and butcher shop about where

Centre 2000 is today; south-east across the creek, Joe Germain had his log cabin and harness shop; and further south George Breeden had a blacksmith shop and “Breeden’s Hotel”. That was Grande Prairie ca. 1908.

In 1910, the Argonaut Company from Edmonton got the bright idea to build a town here—it was the perfect spot, on good prairie land to grow gardens and crops, with lots of forest for logs and lumber to the south, and beside the creek for water. They bought out Joe Germain and surveyed a 16 block townsite north of the present day Richmond Avenue. They called it Grande Prairie City. 102 Street was to be Main Street or “The Boulevard”, with a row of trees down the centre of the street.

Follow the paved pathway south down the hill into Muskoseepi Park, across the creek, past the pavilion and Grande Prairie Museum, where there is a large collection of First People’s tools and arrowheads which have been found in the vicinity. There are also some original buildings, including the Hudson’s Bay Outpost, built further up Bear River in 1898, and the first Presbyterian Church, built in 1911.

Continuing south you pass by the basement of one of the homes which was built in the creek valley. An interpretive sign tells you this was the home of Joseph Plante, an Iroquois Cree. When the Plante family lived here, the Bear Creek valley was filled with homes. They were cleared out when planning started for what was then called “Central Park”.

The path now leads under the main road past where Joseph Vos’s Flour Mill (which also was the first electricity plant) was located beside Cooke’s Lumber Mill. To the east, on top of the bank, the first home you see was the J.O. Patterson house. The Pattersons were members of the Argonaut Company, owners of the first store—known as the Patterson & Son--and J.O. was the first postmaster. They built this lovely home in 1916, at about the time Carriage Lane, the road that curves along Bear Creek at the top of the bank, was laid out and the first homes built there.



*W.H. Smith & Sons homestead, ca. 1905.  
SPRA 2001.1.104*

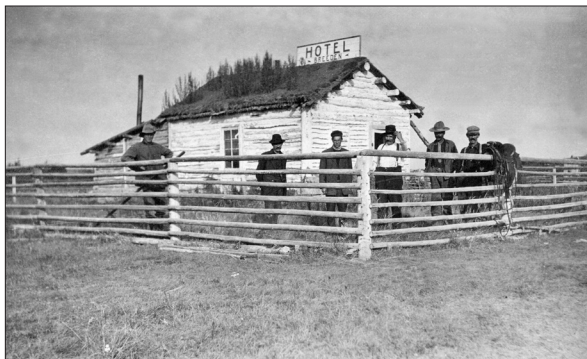


The path continues over an iron foot-bridge over the creek, then under the railway trestle which was built by the Northern Alberta Railway in 1924. When it was built, this bridge was listed in Ripley's Believe It or Not as the only bridge which went over the same creek three times. Since then the creek has been straightened out and the bridge filled in with banked dirt, so it is not so spectacular.

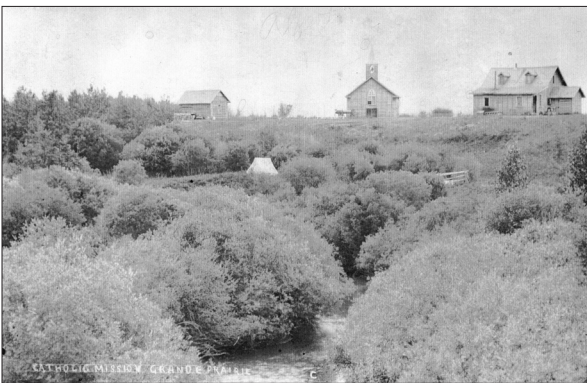
This is about where the original government bridge crossed Bear Creek. From here the trail led west to St. Vincent's Catholic Mission and east up the hill to George Breeden's "Hotel" and Blacksmith Shop. Further afield, these trails branched out, the west towards Flying Shot Lake and Lake Saskatoon, and the east to the Smoky and Spirit Rivers. Most likely the trails were the original pitching trails of the Beaver and Cree First Nations, picked out over the centuries as the best routes for their seasonal journeys. Later they were widened to accommodate the wagons of the settlers.

Today our path runs southward beside the creek. A half mile south of the 100th Avenue bridge, St. Vincent's Mission stood on the top of the west bank. The first graveyard was there too, but it was moved in the 1960s when creek bank erosion began to affect the gravesites.

As you continue south you see can see caragana bushes and horseradish plants which are evidence of home sites that have eroded into the valley.



*Hotel Breeden, ca. 1910. SPRA 2006.36.01*



*St. Vincent's Mission on the west bank of Bear Creek ca. 1910. SPRA 1998.8.4*

A climb up the hill opposite 92nd Avenue brings you to the spot where a large Ski Jump was built in the 1920s. Through the trees you can catch a glimpse of the William Innes log cabin and barn.

The trail now skirts around and down the hill and across Bear Creek at the bottom of "Thrill Hill". At the top of the bank, imagine the Wapiti Club, built in 1913 as a place to enjoy a game of tennis in the summer.

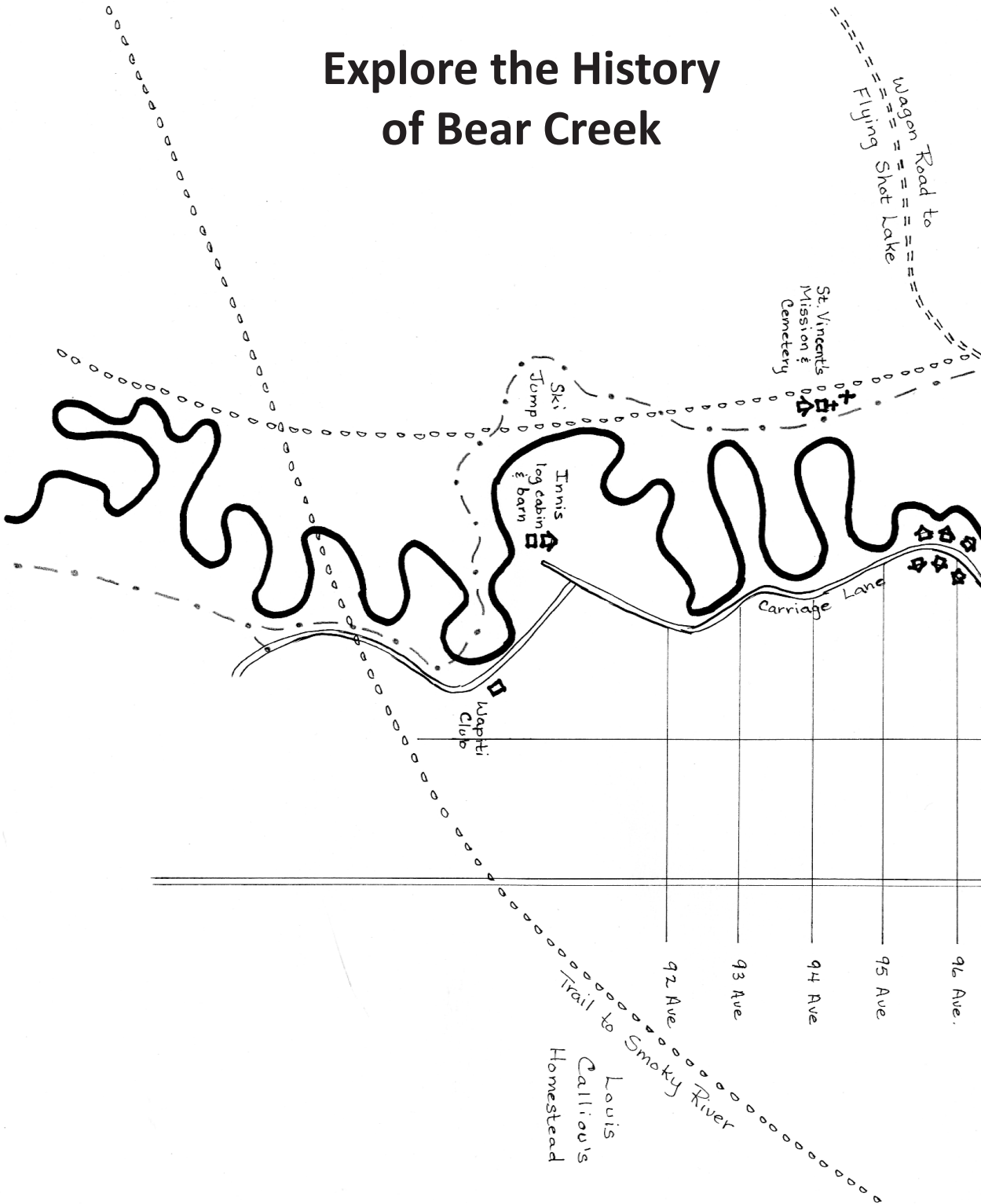
Soon after Thrill Hill, the Muskoseepi Park Trail branches upwards to 102nd Street. This is the end of our tour through one of Grande Prairie's most wonderful resources and a piece of our past.

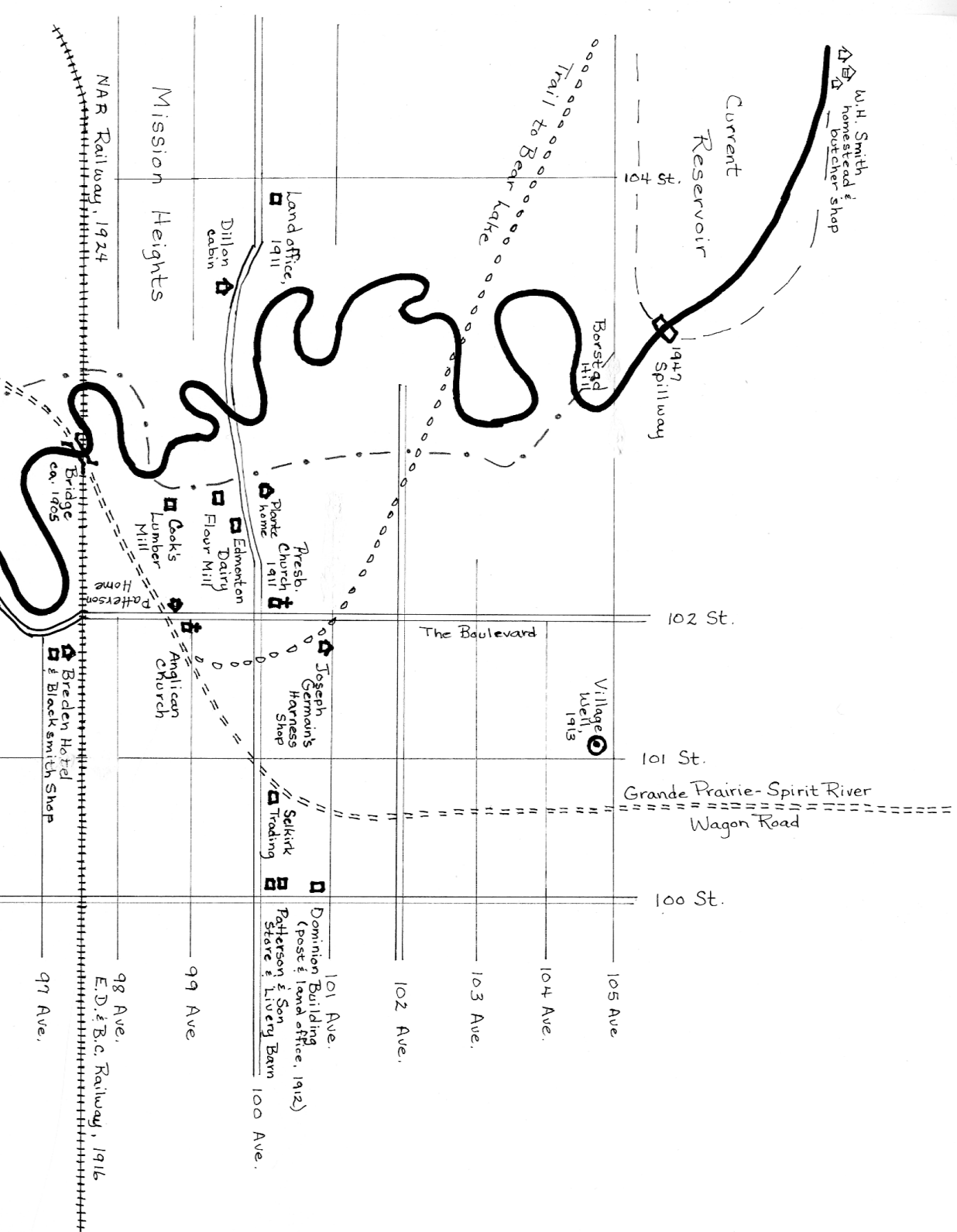


*Joseph Voz's Flour Mill on the east bank of Bear Creek, ca. 1912. SPRA 1998.8.1*



# Explore the History of Bear Creek





# The Carlisle Family Album

Dr. A.M.(Murray) Carlisle arrived in the Grande Prairie area in 1921 at the request of his brother-in-law Jack Archer, who was living at Lake Saskatoon. A doctor was urgently needed. Soon after his arrival he met Jean Mc Farlane, daughter of James McFarlane of Cutbank Lake Farm, and they were married in 1923. The Doctor's office in Lake Saskatoon was part of his house and Jean had to double as nursing assistant and meal provider as patients often came from a distance. When the village of Lake Saskatoon was moved to Wembley, the Carlisle medical practice went as well, and it was there that their three

children, Jim, David, and Mary Jean were born. Dr. Carlisle had to travel to Grande Prairie nearly every day so eventually the family moved and Dr. Carlisle continued practising in Grande Prairie for the next 21 years. Jean served the community in many ways including 17 years on the Grande Prairie School Board. In 1957, they retired to Victoria.

The Carlisle Family Album was donated to South Peace Regional Archives by Dr. Jim Carlisle and Mary Jean Freebury in 2010. The album contains about 350 photographs on various subjects such as the Carlisle, Archer and McFarlane families; trips to Monkman Pass, the Wapiti, Slave Lake and Banff-Jasper; friends and neighbourhood children; army cadets and scouts; and the Alaska Highway Construction.



*Above, the Carlisle's new home in Grande Prairie in 1936. SPRA 399.01.02. Right, Dr. Carlisle, Jim, Mary Jean and David at home, Christmas 1941. SPRA 399.01.43.*

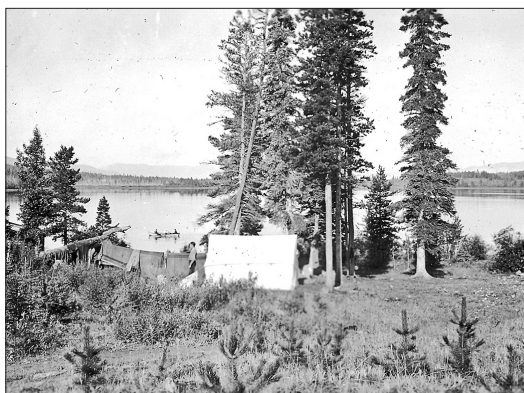


*Left, neighbourhood kids Bobby Knight, Jim & Joyce Powers, Marjorie Smith, Marion Shields, Jean Freebury, David Carlisle, Norma Freebury, Mary Jean Carlisle, Carolyn Harris, Ian Morrison, and Dick Harris playing in Carlisle's back yard. SPRA 399.05.01.*





*A favourite place for the Carlises to holiday appears to have been the Monkman Pass area. These photos show scenes from two trips in 1940 and 1941. Left, the Lodge at Kinuseo Falls showing Murray Carlisle, B. Archer, H. Shields, Jim Carlisle, and R. Fawcett with their catch of fish (SPRA 399.08.22); below left, their camp at Stoney Lake (SPRA 399.09.05); and below, David and Mary Jean Carlisle on horseback (SPRA 399.09.39).*



*Left, Grande Prairie High School grade 12 students in 1945. SPRA 399.11.07*

# Watching Grande Prairie Grow

*by Gordon Percy*

Growing up in Grande Prairie or anywhere in the Peace Country in the 30s, 40s and 50s, certainly had its challenges and rewards.

Think about this: no television, penicillin, polio shots, frozen food, Xerox, contact lenses, credit cards, ball point pens, frisbees, the pill, dish washers, clothes dryers, Pizza Hut, McDonalds, A & W, instant coffee and a zillion other items that we could think of, that came into being after 1960. But we had a 5 and 10 cent store--Newton & Smart--where you could actually buy something for a nickel or a dime!

Grande Prairie was a small town by today's standards, maybe 1000 when I came on the scene in 1927, but still the largest town in the south Peace.

It had wooden sidewalks and dirt streets, and you wore great rubber boots following a two-day rain. You might even lose them in the blue gumbo. Or maybe you just went barefoot. It was still a great place to grow up. There was one theatre, the Capitol, where you could see flicks with sound on a recording that sometimes did not coordinate too well. To get in to see the show, kids could collect 10 wrappers from Spicer's Sweet Crust bread and a nickel.

Entertainment consisted of your own resources, with your friends: damming the creek to make a swimming hole; skinny dipping during the warm days of summer; winter sledding on Tanner's Hill (where the Golden Age Center is today); scrub ball, Kick the Can, Run Sheep Run; hiking to the Wapiti to hunt squirrels and racing garter snakes; collecting birds' eggs; exploring Bear Creek for summer fun. In the winter time there was Road Apple Hockey or outdoor skating rinks where you had to clean off the snow first; skiing on Bear Creek's higher banks; skating on Crystal Lake, learning the intricacies of finance by playing Monopoly. Needing money? Take on a paper route (Edmonton Journal, Edmonton Bulletin or Chicago Tribune for weekly comics).

Travel: I remember watching the first air mail plane arriving on Bear Lake and the development of the Grande Prairie Air Field with arriving planes and local flyers trying their wings. Local builders created their own aircraft, which did fly, but barely. A BIG trip was to go to Sturgeon Lake to fish--and you could bring back everything you caught!

Watching Grande Prairie grow: the first full steam laundry service by the Blais family, the first Northern Alberta Dairy Pool and Northern Bottling Works, and the introduction of Coca Cola; the first Radio Station, CFGP (I joined their staff at the tender age of 16); Kelly's Hamburger Stand, much later Joe's Corner Coffee Shop; building the Donald Hotel; the first Alberta Treasury Branch; growth of the farm machinery business.

Then the war came and Grande Prairie took on a whole new appearance. A Basic Training Center was built in the south part of town (90th to 93rd Avenue), and the airport expanded to make room for the war effort. U.S. army and air force personnel arrived and the Early Warning Radar site at Saskatoon Mountain east of Beaverlodge was established.

All of these military personnel needed services to support them, which meant an expansion of services in the town. Bear Creek was dammed to support a water system, roads were upgraded, even paved, and new industries like Mackie's Concrete Works, lumber yards and oil & gas emerged.

Growing up and watching Grande Prairie grow has been an exciting time. It has been a great place to raise a family and welcome new people, as entrepreneurs along with local people of vision continued to make things happen. Becoming a city in 1958 was another milestone and the beginning of another new era. It has been a personal pleasure to have been able to play a small part in that exciting growth.







# A Scary Episode

by Elizabeth Welter

I arrived in this area in 1928 with my parents and younger sister. We traveled north in September of that year and settled on a homestead 6 miles from Grande Prairie. My brother Charles was 9 years younger than me and he was born in Grande Prairie. I attended a one-room country school to grade 8, then high school by correspondence and later 2 years at Agricultural College.

I felt sorry for Charles as he was so much younger and seemed to be alone so much. We all tried to do some extra activities with him as time and money permitted.

There was a movie theatre in Grande Prairie with two shows a night on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The *Boys Town* movie with Spencer Tracy was quite popular at the time and I thought we would both enjoy it. One mild and pleasant spring day we decided to have supper early and walk into town to see the 7 o'clock show. We planned to rest for the 2 hours of the movie, have a small lunch at the Palace Cafe and walk the 6 miles home.

We enjoyed the show so much, Spencer Tracey was a wonderful actor even though it was all black and white then. Horrors as we left the theatre--what a shock as a beastly spring blizzard had arrived, big drop in temperature, heavy snow and a strong NW wind. The idea of lunch was quickly forgotten as we started for home.

I knew Dad would be worried sick for us and we didn't hear the storm inside with the noise of the movie. Now we had two possible routes home--either to turn south at the 1 mile corner or stay on the highway and turn south at the 2 mile road which is now referred to as Costco Corner. Besides there was some fencing along some of the fields next to this road which we could always follow if the visibility worsened with the drifting snow.

There were very few snow plows about at that time. It was harder walking all the time facing the

bitter wind and Charlie being so much smaller was getting tired. We were fairly well-dressed but not to be out on such a night.

We were almost to the Costco Corner when a car came up behind us--we stepped out of the track to let it pass. There were very few cars on the highway then. It stopped and the man rolled down the window and said, "What in the world are you two kids doing out on a night like this?" I said, "Hello Mr. Thompson" and he shot back, "You may know me but I don't know you." He lived a bit farther west on the highway and was heading home from Thompson's Store I imagine--he was a friend of my dad's. After a quick answer to his question he said, "get in the car and I'll take you home." I quickly stated "but Mr. Thompson, what if you get stuck in the drifting snow." "Never mind, I'll try" and we very quickly and gladly got inside and soon into our yard.

We certainly covered the 3 or more miles quicker than walking. Of course I invited him to come in--true farm style then--but he declined and wanted to get home too.

We could watch his headlights once he turned north and he seemed to be going along well. Dad was so thankful we were home safe and sound and said, "Please don't ever try to do this again in winter time." We didn't and were lucky as it could have been a different ending to our adventure. Dad stopped at Thompson's Store on his next trip to town and thanked the kind man for helping us.

*Inside the Capitol Theatre in the 1930s. SPRA 2003.5.20.*



# What Archives Do and Why We Do It

by Leslie Pearson, BSc, MAS

*Author's Note: Still no requests from our loyal readers. This issue we've decided to tackle the issue of digitization – why do we/why don't we. If you have an issue for our next issue, please contact us. Any question considered!*

Picture this... You are a researcher from a place far, far away from Grande Prairie. You really need to see some of the documents in one of our collections. "No problem," you think, "I'll just check their website. Surely they will have that collection digitized and ready for me to access from the comfort of my own home." You check the website. You locate the finding aid. Your excitement level is rising higher and higher at the thought that you are just seconds away from seeing the crucial documents. But then you can't find them, because they are not there. You are crushed.

Sound familiar? Okay, even if you have never suffered such a melodramatic experience, you may have felt slightly disappointed when a picture you really wanted to see wasn't available on our website. So why are the Archives causing all this needless pain and suffering? Why don't we just digitize everything?

Before we go too far, I should probably explain what digitization is. Digitization is the term we use to describe the movement of information from an analogue form (ie. documents, photographs, film, tape, etc.) to a digital form stored electronically and accessed using a computer. It is important to note that even after material has been digitized, the Archives still retains the analogue form.

Why do we digitize at all? Two of the key ideas behind digitization are preservation and access. Both of these ideas appear in SPRA's mandate. We can provide much wider access if material is digitized. Digitized material can be posted on the internet to

make it available to researchers at home. Having digitized material available to researchers encourages greater appreciation of archives in general and improves awareness of documentary heritage. Digitized material is also easier for the Archives to access because we can view the material at our desks without having to pull the originals from the storage room.

Providing access to digital copies rather than original materials has the nice preservation side effect of reducing the wear and tear on the originals. The fewer times we have to pull originals out of storage and the less they are handled, the longer they will last. Digitization is also great for damaged or deteriorating material. Digitization allows us to "fix" some types of damage without having to do a conservation treatment on the original. By digitizing material that is deteriorating in a way that cannot be halted or reversed, we can capture and preserve as much information as possible now, before the deterioration gets any worse. As well, some parts of our holdings cannot or should not be viewed in their original format by researchers due to their fragility or the deterioration of the physical media. Film is a good example. Running film through a projector over and over again isn't a good idea if your goal is to have the film outlast you. Plus it's a bit of a pain to have to set the projector up all the time. A digitized copy is easier to use and won't be continually damaging the film. With other parts of our holdings, the Archives doesn't have the old technology necessary to view the originals. For example, there were a lot of different kinds of videotape in use over the years and the Archives doesn't have a machine to play every one of them. We can partially solve this problem and get access to the information on the tapes by sending the material to a transfer house and getting them to digitize the material for us.

*(cont'd on page 18)*

So if having digitized material is so much easier to use for the Archives and our researchers, why don't we digitize everything? Limited resources tops the list of reasons not to digitize. Archives simply do not have the time or money required to digitize all of their holdings. Digitization is an expense that has to be weighed against the benefits of ease of access and probable level of use. It is a poor use of the resources to digitize everything when it is not necessary for most of our holdings. We also have to consider the costs of maintaining the digital copies, making sure that we can afford the digital storage space required and that we will be able to preserve the digital copies for the long term. There is no point digitizing something if the digital copy will be unreadable in a couple of years. Digitization is also time-consuming for the archivists. If we were to spend time digitizing everything, we would quickly fall behind in our other tasks and fewer collections would be accessible at all, never mind in digital form. We are also limited by the technology available to us. Here at South Peace Regional Archives, we have the technology to digitize some parts of our holdings in-house, but not all. Sending material out to be digitized is particularly expensive and is only considered for selected parts of our holdings. Legal restrictions create another obstacle to digitization. These restrictions include copyright, privacy, and access to information laws, and donor agreements. Not everything an archives acquires is destined to be widely available. Digitizing material that is not allowed to be shown or used is a waste. Conservation concerns are another obstacle to digitization. Sometimes archival material is so fragile that the stress of digitization is deemed to be too great for the resulting benefits. Destroying an original to obtain a digital copy is not an option.

So if we can't digitize everything, how do we decide what to digitize? The Archives takes a few things into consideration when we make digitization decisions. We look at whether we have the technology necessary to view the material in its original form. We look at whether the material is damaged or deteriorating (arguments for digitizing) and its fragility (too fragile to handle or too fragile to digitize). We

check donor agreements and applicable legislation to see if we can legally digitize the material. And we take into account probable public interest and demand. This is part of the reason why photographs are digitized much more frequently than documents. Photographs are physically more attractive and in higher demand by off-site researchers. We might also try to select items which are representative of a larger group or type of item. We always have to weigh the costs of time and money against the benefits of digitization. On a practical level, this means that those items which we have the ability to digitize in-house are more likely to get done than those we have to send out.

So the next time you are sitting at your computer and can't find what you want online, remember this column. There may be a good reason why the material you want isn't available in digital form. Of if that doesn't satisfy you, contact us. Remember, public demand is one of the things we take into account. Especially if you are willing to pay for the digitization!

### **Looking for More Information On What We Do and Why?**

**Check out the new information pamphlets  
on our website:**

**Information for Donors of Archival Records**

**Information for Organizations**

**Information for Museums in the South  
Peace**

**Information for Records Managers**

**or pick them up at the Archives.**

# Society and Member News

## South Peace Regional Archives Society Annual General Meeting

**Saturday, March 12, 2011  
in the Community Room  
at the Grande Prairie Museum**

### **Schedule**

**10:00 a.m. SPRA AGM  
and Beth Sheehan Archives Award**

**11:00 a.m. Museum AGM  
and Isabel Campbell Museum Award**

**12 Noon Combined Lunch  
(suggested \$5 donation)**

**TELLING OUR STORIES WORKSHOP**  
**Saturday, April 16, 2011, 1:00-4:00 p.m.**  
Come and get ideas about keeping your family history alive. Phone Karen Burgess at 780-830-5105 for more information.

## **Film & Story Night**

Many of you enjoyed "Growing Up Albertan" last October. We want to make this an annual event on the first Saturday in October to coincide with Alberta Archives Week.



The theme for 2011 is Community Life and Organizations. SPRA is looking for inspiring and/or amusing incidents about community life, and for people who will tell those stories.

If you have a story, want to be a storyteller, or want to sponsor this event, please call us at 780-830-5105.

## **Some Recent Acquisitions**

John Sinclair records  
*Sinclair Estate*

Cornwall School records  
*Dora Cornelson*

Saskatoon Mtn. Air Base Art Print  
*Margaret Bowes*

Wozniak family 8mm film, Eaglesham  
*Mathew Wozniak*

Halcourt Cemetery Records  
*Bill & Josie Dahl*

Rotary Club of Grande Prairie records  
*Karen Munjak, President*



# South Peace Regional Archives Society

## Membership Application Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Interested in being involved as a \_\_\_\_\_ volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ board member

There are two types of membership:

Full memberships are for individuals who want to be involved in the society, allowing them to attend meetings, vote on issues and run for office.

Associate memberships are for individuals who want to receive communications from the society to keep them updated on happenings at the Archives, but not attend meetings.

This membership is \_\_\_\_\_ new \_\_\_\_\_ renewal

Full Membership \$20.00/person or \$30.00/couple \_\_\_\_\_

Associate Member \$15.00/person \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to donate to the South Peace Regional Archives \_\_\_\_\_

Total Membership and Donation \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay by cash or cheque to

South Peace Regional Archives Society  
Box 687, Grande Prairie, AB. T8V 3A8  
Phone: 780-830-5105  
Fax: 831-7371  
E-mail: [spra@telus.net](mailto:spra@telus.net)