TELLING OUR STORIES

Volume 2, Issue 1, December 1, 2010 *published by South Peace Regional Archives*

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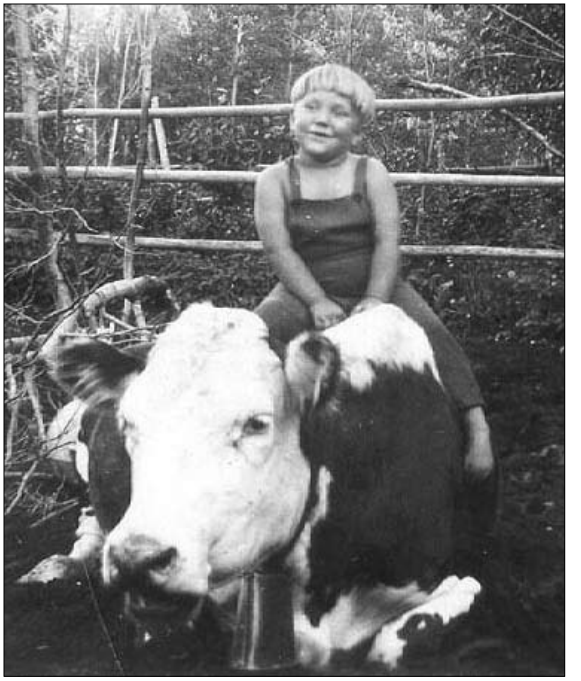

The above photograph of Wayne Holmen on the Holmen farm near Valleyview in 1948 is the epitomy of a child growing up in rural Alberta. We used this photo to advertise "Growing Up Albertan" (see p. 3). Photo from the "Journey to the Millennium" collection, SPRA 175.096.05.

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.

Family History Day

The Grande Prairie Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society and SPRA staff are offering assistance in genealogical research on Family Day, Monday, February 21st, in the Community Room at the GP Museum. Come explore your roots.

December 1, 2010

Dear Members & Supporters;

Our newsletter this month is a publication of some of the stories told at "Growing Up Albertan", an evening of story and film at the Archives. We enjoyed the stories so much that we thought our members and readers would enjoy them again, even if they were present at the event.

The story-tellers were from a wide range of areas and backgrounds. MLA Wayne Drysdale was perhaps the youngest speaker. He shared an unscripted memory of spending every New Year's Eve at Joe's Corner Coffee Shop, so you won't find his story in this issue.

There were 17 speakers and/or readers in all, and we will try to fit those stories not included in this newsletter into future issues.

The film clips, which were great fun, came from two 16 mm film collections at the Archives: film recorded at Eaglesham during the 50s and 60s and donated by Greg Donaldson; and film taken by Griff James in Grande Prairie and the wilderness areas around the Peace. Images from the films can be seen on pages 10 and 11.

These films are good examples of what individuals and families deposit in Archives. Personal collections give archives some of their most interesting and valuable holdings. See Leslie's article on page 18 for more information on what we collect from families and why.

Reading the stories isn't the same as hearing them told first-hand. The archives will have an event like "Growing Up Albertan" again next fall, with a different theme. If anyone is interested in being a sponsor for the event in 2011, please see the notice on page 19.

Thanks again for supporting the South Peace Regional Archives Society. We appreciate each and every member.

Sincerely,
Mary Nutting, Archivist
South Peace Regional Archives

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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.

“Growing Up Albertan”

On October 2, 2010, more than one hundred people crowded into the community room at the Grande Prairie Museum to hear seventeen guest speakers tell stories about their experiences growing up in the south Peace River Country of Alberta.

The evening of film and storytelling was in celebration of Archives Week, an annual event sponsored by the Archives Society of Alberta to raise awareness of the historic documents, photographs and other records preserved by Alberta’s numerous archival institutions.

During Archives Week (October 4-9, 2010) archives in Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Hinton, Peace River, Red Deer and St. Albert presented exhibits, film nights, behind-the-scenes tours and other events to invite people in and share their unique holdings.

The ASA websight, www.archivesalberta.org, features a virtual exhibit which highlights images of childhood from the early 1900s to the 1970s. These images were drawn from the holdings of 22 archival institutions around the province.

Guest speakers at the South Peace Regional Archives event were given a 2011 calendar, produced by the ASA, which features selected images from the virtual exhibit.

The ASA gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation and Government of Canada through Library and Archives of Canada, as administered by the Canadian Council of Archives, for Archives Week 2010.

With Special Thanks to

New Horizon Co-op

Pat’s Auto Bumper to Bumper

Modern Decore Carpet One

for sponsoring “Growing Up Albertan”

and to

Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune

for assistance with advertising.

Below, Mistress of Ceremonies, Karen Burgess, kept a running commentary between the film clips and the stories as well as introducing the 16 storytellers, including Fran Moore, on the right.

Boots to the Rescue

by the Honourable Mel Knight,
MLA Grande Prairie-Smoky

This is the story of a boy and a very special dog.

I was a railroad kid and lived in a few railroad towns in Northwestern Alberta. Shortly after I was born in Beaverlodge my Dad bought me a Water Spaniel pup.

The dog and I were pretty much inseparable; she would take me for a walk and even be sure I got home from the store with the milk and bread.

When I was around five years old we moved to McLennan. There was a railway maintenance shop there and it was a busy crew change town for the Northwestern Alberta Railway. The engines in those days were all steam and when they cleaned and flushed them the warm water ran to a settling pond near Kimiwan Lake very close to town.

One very wintery Saturday there was a wedding in town. Decorated cars and so on, you know. A young boy couldn't resist lifting a few crepe paper streamers and running down the lake with them. Why I was wearing my Dad's rubber boots I couldn't tell you, but I was and a winter parka with a big hood too.

I ran out onto the settling pond with streamers in tow, what fun it was.

Suddenly…Crack! Crack! Crack! The ice let go and down I went. Everything was black, but I could see the hole above me. I kicked and struggled to the surface out of air and very frightened.

Then I felt my parka being tugged and I saw Boots with her teeth latched onto the hood. She had broken the ice out of the hole, grabbed me, and was pulling me back to the shore. We clambered out onto the snowy bank and I immediately headed for home. By the time I got there I was a complete ice cube.

I thawed out eventually and you can only imagine how thankful I was that my best friend was so smart and a very good swimmer as well.

Creative Leisure

by Mr. Chris Warkentin,
MP for Peace River

As the second oldest of five brothers and a sister, I grew up on our family farm north of DeBolt. Especially in my younger years there was little extra money to be spent on luxuries, but we learned with a little creativity we could have a lot of fun.

The farm life afforded us opportunities never dreamt of by our more urban contemporaries. While our opportunities to take part in organized sports were limited to springtime soft ball, we took advantage of less organized sporting endeavors to fill the other three seasons.

In the summer we would spend hours on the Simonette River banks, jumping from ropes connected to overhanging trees or conveniently located bridges, into what was usually incredibly frigid waters. This pastime grew as we did; the ropes got longer, the trees got taller and the cliffs we would jump from got higher... that was until the summer my brother had the unfortunate experience of breaking both wrists and one of his ankles when one of our ropes broke and he went flying into a pile of rocks rather than the water.

Our return to school in the fall usually provided fertile ground for new and creative ideas to occupy our limited time between evening chores and supper. One such ingenious idea was to build bombs out of all the chemicals on Dad's shop shelves that brandished explosive symbols, having learned in school that we should avoid canisters with such warnings, lest they explode. Educators should know that any suggestion that a young boy might cause an explosion is an invitation rather than a warning. The bombs never exploded much, at least nothing we are going to admit to, with the exception of the aerosol canisters themselves.

Winter brought the snow. And when the snow drifted against Grandpa's abandoned pig barn one winter, it gave us a great opportunity to improve our "bobsledding" technique. That was until my aunt

came barreling out of the house screaming as if her hair was on fire. Apparently she was unconvinced that her daughter, my cousin, should be on the top of a tin roof, forty feet from the ground clinging to a toboggan. My aunt was even less impressed with our adventure as she inspected the back of our ski pants which had been shredded from the screw tops that held the tin roof in place and had sliced into the fabric of our clothing as we slid over them.

Every year led to new and more creative adventures than the last and I am happy to say that even though there were times that we swore secrecy to avoid our mother's wrath, we did avoid death and never did we have an incident that involved law enforcement. I guess by any standard that has got to be a successful upbringing.

Summer of the Flooded Meadow

by Fran Moore (nee Bodeker)

Our homestead, south-west of Valleyview, had been previously owned and had old building sites and old buildings to explore. We had some open fields but much of the quarter was bush. ... Bush with barbs, berries and bears.

We moved to the SW9-70-22-W5 in 1940, I was two years old and my sister Phyl was a baby. Memories of the earliest years are few, but as we grew the fun and adventures were many. So this story isn't just mine, but is also my sister Phyl's story.

Our mother, Eunice, loved her animals and always had horses, sometimes a few cattle, and pigs. She had a milk cow so we had our own dairy products, and she had a big garden, a root cellar and canned all the berries we could pick each summer.

Our father, Graham, worked out most of the time, hunting squirrels, grading roads, in sawmill, but mostly carpentry until oil came to Valleyview in early 50's. He also spent two years in the navy, near the end of the second World War, when I was six and seven years old. Elsie's sister, Verna, lived with us part of this time, as a helper for our mom.

Also on the homestead was our great-grandfather, Thomas Augustus Brady, who lived in a little log shack, split his own wood, and cooked his own meals. When our mother did chores and I started school, he would have the company of sister Phyl, then about four. Great-granddad died in 1948 when I was 10, at 88 years.

The pastures, hills and valleys of this quarter section became our playground, our life. We lived on the western edge in a frame house in a clearing, through a bush path north, past the outhouse, was the garden and then the pasture. To the east a trail led down a slight hill to Grandad's cabin, and the barn yard, with its old buildings. Beyond the buildings the pasture went down hill and then up again to a cluster of trees where we explored the depressions where buildings had been.

The bush, wasn't just bush - it was our dessert and we took it all in. In late June we were fortunate to find many patches of strawberries, and Dad made a game of picking them so young fingers put the berries in the container and not in the mouth.

East of the pasture on the hill were blueberries, and saskatoons where here and there around the quarter. Then from the barnyard going to the south to our property fence was a lovely trail that led to our raspberry patch. We had it all!

We small girls had a very happy life, with parents who didn't expect too much of us. Our mother would even help us build our 'bush playhouses'. She would come out and pound a nail or two to put a pole or board between a few trees, where we would set up housekeeping. What a dream world for two little girls. We picked berries and leaves and cooked up the greatest meals, in our little playhouse, then we would run away from there and get busy doing our exploring. All was well, but a few days later we would come back to the playhouse, and somehow our culinary treasures were less than appealing..... The soups and pies that we had made were ripe with

flavor, and not a pleasant sight or smell. We'd have to clean up this terrible mess, and start over.

In 1950 our parents presented us with the gift of a baby sister to play with, and to care for. Bev was a happy baby and we did enjoyed her.

The summer, when Bev was about one year old, we had a good rainy spell, and then the weather turned really nice. In our exploring we found that the meadow along the north side of the pasture was flooded. Delighted, we went down and waded in the water. Wonderful, a large meadow with warm water, our own 'nature's bathtub'.

Then we went home and got our bathing suits on, and really enjoyed this new entertainment spot. Mom took a picture of us three sisters sitting in the warm water of the meadow. Now we really were able to explore the meadow, with its grassy bottom, warm water. We had to watching for holes and for sticks, but it was a very special time, and we spent some very happy hours there. In a few days however, our big tub drained and it was just a grassy meadow again.

We had a good life on the homestead, mostly free to play, but also taught to help out with duties of everyday life. I remember packing water or snow, and wood. I remember helping put the vegetables in the root cellar. Phyl remembers working in the house. When I was 12, I remember driving a little Ford tractor pulling Dad, who was on the binder. I remember the threshing outfit being at our homestead one fall and helping Mom take out a lot of food at lunch time.

Below, Fran, Bev and Phyl in the Summer of the flooded meadow. Photo courtesy of Fran Moore.

Life on the homestead holds many special memories for Phyl and I ... it was a great place to grow up. Nature was all around us. Sometimes scary... like the time I, at about seven years, was walking alone the mile to the neighbors, the Rasmussens. I got to their field and saw what I thought at first was a dog. It turned out to be a family of coyotes. I picked up a big stick and kept on going ... I'm sure I wouldn't be as brave today, but then it was part of my life.

Then there was the fall that Phyl and I walked in bear tracks in the newly fallen snow, as we walked to school one morning. The bear had come from the north west, down our road, to get a drink at our dugout, I suppose, and then had walked back, probably toward where he was going to hole up for the winter.

Growing up in the natural environment has had a great influence on my life. I still like living in the bush... even though we have a paved road nearby. I still enjoy picking berries, canning, and gardening... even though we have everything available without these tasks. I still love to drive or walk in the woods and do so every summer, just to enjoy the smells the sounds and the sites... and even take a picture. I still have a beautiful woods.

Fran notes: After the speeches, we visited with Elsie Norton, and found out that the picture used in the promotion of this evening was from her family, and the reason she came. The little boy riding the cow in the picture was her young brother, Wayne. The Holmen family lived about a mile north of us, and we stopped and visited them often when going 'to town'.

Child Labour during the Depression

By Roy Bickell

My Grandfather was a farmer, blacksmith and harness maker. He made harness from the hides of cattle or moose after fleshing them, then weighting them with rocks in vats of water mixed with ashes and bark from spruce trees that contained tannins. Then the hide would be laced over a number of eight-sided wooden rollers which were cranked by hand for hours and hours--a good job for grandchildren.

My Father was a farmer and owned a steam-powered sawmill, planer and shingle mill. Power for farming, logging and milling was supplied by steam, horses and manpower.

As youngsters in the 1930s, the children helped by climbing trees to hook long cables high up on trees so horses could pull them over after the roots were cut with an axe.

In addition to regular chores, such as gathering the milk cows, milking, feeding or watering the animals, separating milk, hauling water and wood, picking roots and rocks, weeding the garden, etc., we also had mill duties.

During the day, the shingle mill would cut shingles from clear wooden blocks (no knots, splits or defects). The shingles would accumulate in a large pile and after school our job was to pack them into bundles, banded with two 1" x 2" sticks and tin cut from oil cans.

Also at the mill, the good slabs (cut from straight, low taper logs) were saved and used for fencing and second-tier roof boards. The unwanted slabs were cut into four-foot lengths and thrown onto a pile.

Our job was to carry the four-foot slabs and pile them to dry, and carry dry slabs back from the prior year's dry pile for the steam engine. The steam engine would consume quite a large pile of slabs every day. If breaking land, the firewood and water was hauled to the field.

Looking back on these activities, it was a productive, useful way to keep busy, leaving very little time to get into trouble. Everyone contributed.

Community Telephones

by Lavern Sorgaard

In about 1920 the Alberta Government telephone line arrived at LaGlace. Since there was no expansion in the rural area, the people of LaGlace decided to build their own. This system kept expanding till 1934 when there were close to 40 subscribers, which was actually too many for a single line. It was in operation till the first part of the sixties.

The phones were a wooden rectangular wall instrument weighing around 40 lbs. The earphone hung on the left side, the microphone stuck out from the middle of the box, 2 bells on top and handcrank on the right side. To phone you lifted the earphone off its hook, if the line was clear you rang whatever combination of rings assigned to the person you wanted. These ranged from 2 short, ours was a short, a long, a short. Any combination, maximum was 5 rings to accommodate the 40 members.

Well, wonder of wonders, it worked, when you finished your conversation you gave the crank a quick short turn to tell everyone that you were through with your call. There was no phoning after 10 PM unless an emergency.

In LaGlace at Larson's store they had the AGT and our rural phone side by side. When an urgent message for a doctor, hospital or RCMP was to be relayed, whomever answered had to have a receiver in each hand and be sure they spoke into the right mouth piece. Nobody dared do any courting over the phone. I almost think it was the forerunner of Facebook because there could be any number of friends or otherwise listening. But just the same it provided communication, comfort, security and in time of need help was only a phonecall away.

School Days in the Olden Days

By Barbara Hofmeister

Children today enjoy teasing their parents about the climb uphill all the way to school and struggling through three-foot drifts. Ja, ja, Dad!! I look back and think what courage and determination our parents had to get us to school and back to have an education.

My first school was Wellington, which was 4½ miles from our home. I don't remember how I got to school but assume my Dad or the hired man took me with horses or the farm truck. Getting home I was on my own. I walked or caught a ride with Conrads who had horses. One time at Conrad's gate where the railroad went by, two men sat on a speeder (a small flat deck on wheels) which carried the men and the tools they needed for repairs on the tracks and keeping them neat and free of debris. They asked me if I would like a ride. Of course I side "yes". They dropped me off at the end of our road where I went skipping along having had a ride I will never forget.

Other times I was not so lucky and had to walk from the top of Mercer Hill to the Emerson Trail road. My mother could see me from our upstairs window through a telescope and said I spent more time walking backwards than forwards, looking for a ride. I did sometimes ride with strangers who were always kind and friendly.

The following year I was able to go to MacHenry School, which was only 2½ miles from our home. I came to enjoy nature as I walked along the road seeing the crocuses in the spring, the roses in summer and many kinds of birds. Walking through a field in a thunderstorm was magic, the thunder rumbling all around, the light show and the rain on one's face.

We played Fox and Geese, Kick the Can, Tag and other games at recess as well as ball and snowball fights. Our Christmas concert filled the school with parents and babies as we sang, played our instruments, had skits and recitations. I remember one slow-speaking boy ending his recitation with "and all your Dad can lick is a postage stamp."

My last year there my sister and brother also went and in the winter we were able to take a cutter (small sleigh) with our old horse Dolly. Being the oldest, I felt it was my job to get the horse out of the barn and hook her up. My teasing brother enjoyed swatting the horse on the hind end when I was in with her. It startled her and scared the living daylights out of me. Then on the way home he took the reins, waved them up and down making old Dolly go for all she was worth. I thought she was running away not realizing she was too old for that even if she had wanted to.

We learned our times tables, and to write a good handwriting; we learned of the world, of loyalty, and we memorized poetry some parts of which we remember today!

"The goldenrod is yellow,

The corn is turning brown,

The tall trees in the greenwood

With fruit are bending down."

and another –

A rain washed sky, the morning sun

A laugh along the trail.

A call as clear as a thrush's note.

The clink of a dinner pail.

Because that is what many of us took our lunch in – a lard pail.

Grade 6 in Grande Prairie was quite boring after all that but Jr. High in Clairmont was fantastic. A two room school, our teacher was very good and good looking too! We played softball with other schools, played basketball and sang in the Music Festival, winning first place in school chorus under the direction of Mrs. Callister who volunteered her time.

Though we still lived in Clairmont I went to High School in Grande Prairie boarding during the week with my aunt and uncle. I did not finish grade 12. I felt that with five more children to educate I had better do something to earn a living.

Those school days were very happy, and lasting friendships were made-wonderful, good memories.

Turn the Radio On

by Lavern Sorgaard

We got a radio in December, 1935. Larson's store at LaGlace had just gotten a radio dealership. Carl Larson wanted Dad to try one for a month because he needed to get one out in the country to show that it worked.

Carl brought a Marconi 8 tube with long and shortwave reception, top of the line radio. For power it needed one 2 volt battery that was rechargeable at Haugen's garage for 50 cents, 3 B batteries and 2 C batteries. These might last the winter if used sparingly. The antenna was a 100 foot copper wire strung up on 2 long poles, supposed to be in a southeast-northwest direction.

Christmas day was cold. Grandfather walked down to our place to hear King George give an address to the nation.

I was 8 years old and got to go with my father to grand-uncle Johannes Johnson's where Dad and Pete Johnson were building a coffin. An elderly bachelor, John McGuire, had passed away and since he had no money this was common practice that communities looked after their own. When we came home that night Mother met us in the door with the news that King George the 5th had passed away Jan. 20, 1936. Well, for an 8 year old my world had suddenly grown and the news from such places as Shanghai, China, and Barcelona, Spain, both with wars raging, made the places on the big globe at school really real.

Radio broke the isolation for us on the homestead. It brought news, Amos and Andy, Fibber Magee and Mollie, Gangbusters, Long Ranger and his horse Silver, Amateur Hour, etc. into our home.

Then in 1937 we got CFGP. We were catching up to the rest of the world. We had a houseful the day they had the official opening broadcast. I do not remember how many hours a day they were on the air but they closed at 10PM with "God Save the King."

From then on since reception was good, at times a little better, everyone was buying radios with local programming; messages for far outlying areas were an added feature. The police had a hard time trying to keep up. When you had a radio you were to have a license, so they spent time driving around looking for antennas. Interestingly people had smartened up, some rigged up antennas in their attics--it worked; Some even hooked the antenna wire to a bedspring--it worked. The arguments and excuses varied but one was that people hated paying five bucks for something coming through the air because wasn't air free?

A display of historical photographs at "Growing Up Albertan" included this one of Velma and Victor Macklin, playing as Mighty Hunters in 1916. From the Ann Macklin fonds, SPRA 177.17.

The Frontier Town of Eaglesham

by Greg Donaldson

Above, still scenes from film taken by members of the Eaglesham community. Preserved by Greg Donaldson and donated to South Peace Regional Archives in 2001.

In the 1950s and 60s Eaglesham was very different than it is today. There was no pavement unti about 1975, and no water and sewer until 1967. The roads were dusty in the summer and rough and icy in the winter. In the spring, it was not uncommon for someone to get their truck stuck in the middle of the street--in town!

But it was a great place for kids to grow up. In the 1950s, there was a lot more people in the surrounding area. Eaglesham School, grades 1-12, had 400 students, even though the population of Eaglesham was only 150.

On the way home from school, there was lots of water to wade in--kids love mud puddles. Building tree houses was another favorite activity, and they didn't have to be torn down because they were an eyesore.

Hallowe'en was the usual time for pranks, which were often innovative but not destructive. With no sewer system, there were plenty of outhouses to push over, and every year some kid fell in the pit in the dark after the homeowner decided to move the toilet ahead a little. Often the next day also revealed someone's farm implement in the slough.

Pranks were not just relegated to Hallowe'en, however. I remember one year, the truck that delivered milk and cheese to all the small stores broke down near Eaglesham. Some young lads happened upon it and decided to deliver milk and cheese to everyone in the neighborhood, leaving it on the front steps. I suppose it might be called theft, but...

There was no crime to speak of, and it was unusual to see a police car in town. Once we had some vandalism at the fairgrounds, and the police showed up two weeks later. Another time there was a fight at a dance and someone broke an arm. They tried to sue, but the judge threw the case out, saying, "Things like that happen in small towns."

I had good friends, and I suppose we ran a little wild. As long as we were home for supper, though, no-one worried. They didn't have to.

Running the Rivers

by Jim James

My dad [Griff James] arrived in the Peace District at the age of six with his mother and father. Some years ago my dad donated his outdoor films to the museum. He spent his whole life here in the Peace River District running up and down the rivers filming his family and friends.

I remember as a young boy going with him, Fred Stevenson and Jack Caldwell up the Wapiti to the mouth of the Narroway, a trip that took a week in his freighter canoe. I can run that same river today in our current jet boat in about 2½ hours.

Then there was a trip up the East Pine and Murray Rivers to Kinuso Falls, also in the canoe, and this time with Jim and Bob Cockrane and I believe Doug Clarkson.

As they grew into long boats with bigger outboard motors I remember going with him, my mother, Dr. McCrum, and Charlie Stojan of Sexsmith up the Peace River, through the Parlapaw and Finlay Rapids to the Clearwater and Wicket Rivers where you could catch two fish on one line at will.

As they grew into jet boats my dad and his friends, Dick Bacon and Jack Deltombe, began running their boats up every river as far as they could go to the head waters of the Peace - the Ospeka and Ingenika Rivers.

In 1967 I was running a boat for CN Location and Construction hauling survey crews to build the Resources Railroad. Our camp was located where Grande Cache is today. There were no other boats in that country in those days and low and behold along comes my dad and his friend, Dick Bacon, on their way to the head waters of the Smoky River.

Dick told me later they ran that boat all the way to the end of the river in what is today Willmore National Park and ran out of water, having to turn the boat around by hand.

Because of the experience I gained from these fellows I went on to take a boat, designed by Dorman Ditch of Grande Prairie and built by Lee's Sheet Metal, from Hay River down the Mackenzie River to Fort Norman, up the Great Bear River to Bear Landing, through the Great Bear Rapids (a piece of river that had never been run before), across Great Bear Lake to Fort Franklin and on up the Northern Reach to the Great Bear Trophy Lodge, which is located 25 miles inside the Artic Circle. I spent the next two months there hauling supplies to the workcrews and outposts before coming home in the middle of September at freeze up.

The James family enjoying swimming and fishing in the rivers of the Peace. Still scenes from Griff James' film collection at SPRA.

Nylons

by Beth Sheehan

A small package called "Stop That Run" was lying on my desk when Mary Nutting saw it. Believe it or not, I recently paid an antique dealer $5 for it just because of the memories it brought. Mary said, "This would be a good topic for a talk," so here I am.

But first, I should give some background on ladies nylon stockings.

I bought my first pair in 1940 or '41, during the Second World War. I believe that was when they were first available in Canada. There was a small store near the office where I worked and whenever we girls learned that there was a new supply in, we'd rush there on our lunch break and hope to buy the one pair we were allowed at a time. They were hard to get so were highly sought after - like gold, and we treated them like gold.

I can't recall what stockings were like before the advent of nylons, but certainly they weren't sheer, or looked like your skin. I think those old ones were called Lisle, and were made of a fine, tightly twisted cotton thread. They weren't glamorous, but we took such good care of them, and mended them over and over. Sometimes the holes got quite big as the stockings got thinner and thinner, especially heels and toes.

I used a stocking darner to mend mine. I don't know why it was called a stocking darner for it certainly didn't darn the stockings - we did it. A stocking darner is a smooth, rounded piece of wood with a handle. You put it inside the stocking and pulled the hole over it to make it easier to see to mend. If the hole was large, you wove mending cotton back and forth to fill it in. It was an art to do it neatly.

Girls' stockings were held up by a garter belt - a waist band with long garters attached - two in front and two in the back. Ladies would wear a girdle or corset, with garters. No magic tops like we have now. We've come a long way, Baby!

I can't recall what the first nylons looked like, but I know they were heavier quality than today's. There was a dark seam up the back that I think was intended to make legs look slimmer, but it was a real pain in the neck, for you had to be so careful to get it straight, or it looked awful. You were always asking your friends, "Are my seams straight?" Some girls painted a black line down the back of their bare legs and pretended they were wearing stockings. That was a tricky operation, but it was all in the name of the war effort!

One place where I worked was 16 blocks from my boarding house, and to save money on street car fare, I usually walked. Nice days it was invigorating, but on cold days I sometimes froze my knees. We didn't have the same kind of clothes we have now. Business girls wouldn't wear long johns or slacks to work. After a few frozen knees, I bought some knee cozies. They were made of light wool and were about 7 or 8 inches long. They just covered your vulnerable knees, and you took them off when you got to work. They helped.

Nylons were knit in the "stocking" stitch. If you got a snag, it would invariably end up in a run, leaving a ladder of cross threads only. But if you were quick and had one of these ("Stop That Run"), you might be able to stop the run before it went too far and you could mend it later. The package says, "Stop That Run" and the directions are: "Tear off a splint. Moisten the ends. Apply at both ends of the run." It was just a bit of glue and a temporary fix only. The manufacturer couldn't have been too sure of the product for a small package of assorted colors of silk thread and a needle were also included.

Also on the market was a little gadget with a latch hook that some gals used. You very carefully inserted it to catch the last stitch at the bottom of the run, and painstakingly worked up until the run was perfectly drawn back together. Then an inconspicuous back stitch or two with needle and thread held it. It was time consuming but worth it. There were ladies who made a business of invisible mending stockings, for a fee of course. Skirts were short, stockings

showed, and there was a war on. It was our patriotic duty to mend stockings!

I have no idea what the original price of nylons was, or how much the ladies charged to mend them, but it must have been less than a new pair would cost. A gift of nylons was better than a box of chocolates in the good old days!

Nylons today are not made like the originals. Now they are more sheer, but more durable - thank goodness. They also come in colors, even black, and in different lengths, from knee high to hip high, with self-adhering tops, as well as the all-in-one panty hose. Such advancement!. And believe it or not, there is warmth in them, they don't cost a fortune, and are readily available.

From time immemorial men have been known to observe and comment on the female leg, and now you know what we ladies have gone through to enhance our legs for you. And we still appreciate them for a gift!

The Burning of the Bay

by Gordon E. Mackey

It was the early 1950s in Grande Prairie. We were living in the unfinished house Dad was building us, and it was just 3 blocks from the Grande Prairie Hudson's Bay Store, which was on the southwest corner of Clairmont Road and Richmond Hill Road, as some people still called it back then. Officially, it may have been Richmond Avenue, but old habits die slowly. When the Bay store burned down, nearly everyone in town came to watch the flames devour the building until it collapsed on itself. Most people left after the fire was nearly out, and the firefighters worked on the final few hotspots in the basement. Keep in mind that everything was now in the basement. The fire was a shock to the entire town, and everybody was talking about it.

After the fire department left, people walked by, looking into the basement of the old store. They saw charred timbers criss-crossed with a few metal heating pipes and metal table legs. In the corners of the basement, there were a few tables still covered with stacks of clothing that survived, but looked charred and blackened and waterlogged.

Back then, the firemen didn't have yellow tape to mark a fire-line that kept people out, so a large number of sawhorse-like road barricades were brought in to ring the old store site. Small groups of people would stand just outside the barricades, talking with each other about the possible causes of the fire and if the Bay would rebuild. As they left, other small groups would form and talk about the same things.

The house that my dad was building was closed in, the 2 x 4 studs marked out the rooms with old sheets and blankets tacked on them to create some privacy for the bedroom areas. My bedroom was in the basement… basically a cot resting on a piece of old linoleum which in turn rested on the dirt floor of the basement. Not classy, but even in winter, the coal furnace kept us warm unless we had to go to the bathroom. With no water or sewer lines yet past our house, we had an outdoor biffy, and we hauled water in cream-cans.

I am telling about our house so you realize no parts of the house were soundproof. A couple of evenings after the Bay burned down, two of my uncles came over for coffee. They yattered on with my parents, Oscar and Ann, and I was eventually sent to bed. If I listened carefully, I could follow the conversation above me. I don't remember the actual words, but they went something like this, in the slow drawling manner the Mackeys used when speaking:

Uncle #1: "What do you think, Oscar, are those clothes in the corners of the Bay any good?"

Dad: "Oh I doubt it. They looked pretty charred to me."

Uncle #2: "Maybe we could go over there, climb down and check them out. We could bring the best ones home. They'll just be hauled to the dump anyway."

Mom: “Now Oscar, that would be stealing! Don’t even think about it!” (She never told my uncles what to do, other than by telling my dad, in front of them.)

Uncle #1: “Well, it wouldn’t be stealing, because there’s no real value there. We’d just see if the clothes are any good. There might be a nice dress for you, Ann.”

Mom: “I don’t want any stolen dress. Oscar, you’re not going over there to steal anything. We’ve never been thieves and we’re not starting now!”

Uncle #2: “Let’s just drive over there and have a look.”

Mom: “Now? In the dark?”

Uncle #1: “Sure. We can take flashlights. It won’t take long.”

Mom: “Oscar! This isn’t right!”

Dad: “Well I guess going over to take a look wouldn’t hurt much. Should only be a few minutes.”

I heard Dad and my two uncles leave. Mom paced around above me. I could hear her pour more coffee for herself as she muttered to herself. The few minutes went by, and the men didn’t return. An hour. Two hours. Three hours. I couldn’t sleep as I lay there rigid with fear for Dad. What if they got caught by the police? Earlier that evening, I had seen the black police car with the domed red light on top drive along the Richmond Hill Road past the old Bay store every few minutes, keeping watch on the fire site. Finally, Dad and my uncles came back, quietly entering the house and closing the door silently behind them.

Once inside, they began talking faster and giddier than I’d ever heard them talk before. They must have been all souped up on adrenalin. Mom was angry. No, Mom was DAMN MAD!

They relayed the events of that moonless evening to Mom, using shorter sentences that I’d ever heard them use before. Essentially, they’d driven the 3 blocks in their pickup truck, but parked it another block away from the burned-out building. They each grabbed an old empty burlap grain sack from the truck, sneaked over to the old Bay site without using their flashlights and climbed down into the building’s basement using half-burned boards and other trash to step on because the stairs were gone. They kept a hand over their flashlights so very little light got out, found some piles of clothing that were not totally burned, stuffed them into the burlap sacks and climbed back out of the building. It was then they noticed the police car as it sat silently in the back alley. They ran, the police car turned on both headlights and the flashing red light, and the cop yelled at them to stop. The unfortunate thing for the policeman was that he had chosen to sneak down the back alley and it was blocked with all those road barricades, which at the same time was a fortunate thing for Dad and my uncles. They were able to get away.

After tossing the bags of smoked, blackened clothes into the back of the pickup, they drove out of town without using their headlights, because with headlights on, tail-lights were also on, and tail-lights could be followed. They drove by the light of a flashlight held out the window. They drove the opposite direction to where they were really headed. When they were out of town and realized they had evaded capture, they turned on their headlights and used back roads, driving 30 miles to the farm of another uncle, who was sleeping soundly in his bed. When they got there, they silently climbed into a half-full grain bin, removed the clothes from the bags, and buried the clothes under a layer of grain so they weren’t visible but could dry out. Two or three months later, on another moonless night, Dad and my uncles sneaked back to that grain bin and dug the charred clothes out from under the grain, and quickly divided them amongst themselves.

We found that only two items Dad brought home were savageable; the rest of the batch had their incineration completed in our burning barrel. Mom had to wash those 2 items about 4 or 5 times before the stench of smoke was gone to her satisfaction. I

got a pair of heavy woolen pants good for winter use and Dad got a wool shirt which was badly scorched down one side. He used it as his welding shirt, but when its side quickly deteriorated, Mom refused to repair it.

My innocent uncle came for coffee one day much later, and told us about his bin of grain that reeked of smoke, and he couldn't figure out why. Nobody said anything.

Cow Stories

by Bob Patterson

I guess everybody who grew up with cows, or works with cows as a livin', has cow stories. My stories are no different--these are my recollections as a Kid growing up in "South Patterson Place."

My first incident "so to speak" happened at what is now Pipestone Creek Park or where the old ferry used to work on the Wapiti river.

For some reason there were 20 or 30 cows on the south side of the river--no-one seems to remember why. One thought that Mr. Bert Osborne had bought them from someone at South Wapiti or West Grovedale area and they needed to come home to the Wembley area. The other theory was that these cows already belonged to Osborne and had crossed the river at low water somewhere and were just lookin' for greener pastures (In the late fifties there was no fences in the area--they would just go as far as the river for water and usually no problems.) We assume now that the cows were fed on the south of the river until the river froze over and then they could walk across.

I always wanted to be a cowboy so I was on a horse (I don't know whose horse, probably some ol' retired plow nag.) I was down river a bit from the cows to keep them on the sleigh trail behind the team, and this ol' horse broke through the ice--right up to his belly. The ice broke in a small area just enough for it to stand--it couldn't get its front legs up to climb out so he just sort of bucked around in that cold water, I got soaked very soon and everybody came runnin' over there to get me out of this mess, thinking the current may take this ol' cow pony down under the ice. I got sent to the truck, and I got to start it by myself!! It was a 1952 I.H.C. 1 ton, probably had a heater and everything, but not great!!

There was 10-12 men around there and somehow they got enough rope and what-ever on that horse, they pulled it straight side ways with the team and sleigh and other horses, and out he came up on the ice and snow – they removed all the rope and turned it loose to go with the cows. I remembered it shivering bad, someone would have had to drive that ol' truck all the way around on the roads to get back to Osbornes, and the cows would go up that hogs back you can see at Pipestone Park today.

I remember getting to Mrs. Osborne's house and getting fired up with dry clothes. The house was very warm as all those cowboys' wives were there preparing a big meal when they got in. After supper I was out again with the big boys, and remember seeing that horse in that ol' log barn which was full of cows,!! trying to warm it up, and it was nice in there.

During supper I remember my mother disciplining those ol' boys about not watching that kid and where he was going. It was then that I realized it could have been a serious deal. I guess from what I know now, that ol' horse would be fine by morning in that warm barn, and would get turned out to a straw pile, or maybe he would stay in and have to go to work, feeding cows everyday!

My next Cow Story would be about the "wild cow" Again, everybody had one--I don't know why, probably 'cause she raised a good calf every year. Our beef cows or "outside" cows calved on a big straw bed in the bush east of our house. During calving we would close the gate so no cow would go out in the bush in the snow to avoid the embarrassing "calving" episode.

It was no different for the wild cow--she was fine until we had to move the cows or whatever. Any more than one person in the area, she would be at

the perimeter. When she calved we would use the tractor and or the team to drag in a grain bin, our safety building. The crazy ol "b" was very protective, of course, of her new offspring so someone would distract the ol' cow and 2 or 3 more would grab the calf, throw it on the wagon or sleigh behind the tem and hussle like hell to that grain bin – give the little one an ear tag or whatever it needed, then back on the sleigh back to the straw bed, and mom would soon find it and usher us out of there. After that we would have to be careful being in there checking on other cows etc.

All those Hereford cows would go to the "Smoky", a summer pasture along the big Smoky River south and west of Grande Prairie approximately 30 miles. At that time the area got to be known as "Pattersons Flat", and although Pattersons haven't had cattle there for 50 years it is still known as Pattersons Flat Others have had cattle on the pasture over the years, such as Les Head and Fred Dobbyn.

As the grass would be grazed off late in the fall, or they would get a killing frost on the low ground, and some of the sloughs and other water holes would dry up, and just because them ol' cows knew where home was they would start to migrate home. They would follow what is now the Canfor haul road and cross the Wapiti east of what is now Wayerhauser and follow the Wagon trail up along the north bank of the Wapiti to approximately the "Dunes Golf Course and head north to home. As a kid I loved to catch a horse and go and meet them somewhere along the trail and bring some home. Mother always warned us about going into the Bear Creek and on the Wapiti--we never did anything wrong!! if we found a few cows grazing along the way or relaxing on the trail we could bring them home. Being cowboys, at home we would separate our cow out of the bunch and send Bill Salmond's cows straight on up the road ("100 Street") as Bill lived ½ mile north of town, approximately where the north end McDonalds is today (118-119 Ave).

After having and working with and cows all my 64 years I have had a few injuries and scares. We also boarded breeding bulls for 14 years and the odd one had me down or stepped on me and certainly kept me busy fixing fences. The few problems working with the heavy horses I have been worried about is what might happen if I had a wreck. One of our daughters, who is a nurse and/or R.T. and has seen me convalescing a couple times, said I'll never make it to old age: "You'll probably get killed by some damn stupid cow while riding a stupid green horse in the bush." – Well, let's get on and go.

On the Banks of the Beaverlodge River

by Milton Hommy

I had the pleasure and experience of growing up on the banks of the Beaverlodge River, with my mom & dad, Verna & Henry, one sister and two brothers. We lived in a two storey log house with a stone masonry basement on a quarter section. In those days it was usually the responsibility of the oldest in the family to care for their younger siblings while the parents did chores and the first to help my dad with the farming. I was also given harvest leave from school in the fall to help the neighbors. Probably the first to get into mischief as well. My mom always said, "a little hard work never hurt anyone" and she is a healthy 92.

Attending the one room Gimle school, grade 1-9 was interesting and educational in more ways than one. We would usually get some new clothes in the fall when school started from Eaton's Catalogue, (You all know where the used catalogue went--the outside biffy.) We always had to change into our old clothes to do the chores. The old clothes were used to double up when it was extremely cold, ie; 1 pant cold day or 2 pant cold day. In grade 8 & 9 I did the janitor work at Gimle school for $5.00 a month. In the winter I'd ride a horse to school, put the horse in the barn and feed it, then get the fire going in the barrel heater--if it was -30 outside, it was -40 inside. Sometimes the teacher had to read for a bit until the school warmed up enough for the kids to sit at their desks.

In those days if it was -40F or colder at the Grande Prairie airport as announced on CFGP radio, we didn't have to go to school. Of course if it was -40F in GP it was -60F on the banks of the Beaverlodge. The folks would say that temperature wasn't fit for man or beast, so we would be excused from going to school.

Other memories from our growing up experiences. We had a Model T Ford pick-up that wouldn't start unless we pushed it, and the water ran out of the radiator like a sieve. If we went anywhere we would stop on the top of a hill, walk down to the bottom and hope there was water, walk back and fill it with water and push her down the hill to get going, "then repeat."

We spent all one summer building this huge raft, complete with tent, air-tight heater etc. Launch day came, I had my sister christen it with a bottle of water and we were off. We didn't go but a few hundred feet when we rounded a bend and got hung up on a beaver dam, the voyage ended.

In the winter we would clear the snow off the ice on the river. We would chop a hole in the ice and with any luck the water would give a good flood. By the time we were done we were too cold to skate so we would build a fire to warm up.

Many summers we were able to dig the ice out from under the sawdust pile left from sawing wood to make ice cream.

Sunday nights we got to listen to the battery radio, "The Squeaky Door", "The Shadow" etc. The batteries had to be saved for the news and weather.

It's interesting, to me a treat back then was a roll of bologna, a can of prem, canned fruit, baker's bread or anything else store bought.

We milked cows every morning and evening, used a hand crank separator to save the cream. Delivered the cream to the Albright Railway Station to be taken to the Grande Prairie Creamery. As a side note, if we thought we needed a drink of milk while milking we squirted it in our mouth, or at each other.

On cold winter days if we had to travel any distance with a team of horses we would heat rocks and put them in the sleigh box and cover them and ourselves with blankets.

As we had no running water we would get a bath in a little square wash tub once a week whether we needed it or not. In the summer I tried to convince my mother a quick dip in the Beaverlodge River would suffice, but to no avail. Actually swimming in the Beaverlodge River in those days wasn't too bad as long as you didn't mind a few bloodsuckers clinging to you. Often on a warm summer afternoon we would go skinny dipping in the river down by the bridge, a short bike ride from our house. I didn't realize until years later how clear the water actually was and we thought we were camouflaged.

I believe the depression lasted until the 1950's in parts of rural Alberta. When I left the farm at 17 and went to Edmonton to take up the Electrical trade we still had no running water (by pail only), telephone, electricity or indoor plumbing. We still used wood for heating and cooking. I remember not having money to spend but always had lots of good food. Our challenges and pressures were a lot simpler than the ones today.

Right, Hommy Park on the Beaverlodge River where a campsite is now located. Hommy family fonds, SPRA 377.01.07.

What Archives Do and Why We Do It

by Leslie Pearson, BSc, MAS

Author's Note: By the time you get to this page in the newsletter, your interest might be waning. Just think how much more interesting this column would be if I was writing about a question you had about archives! Unfortunately, I have yet to receive a single submission of a question for this column. Please send some submissions soon before we run out of ideas!

Back in July, the Archives staff did a presentation for a group in Rycroft and one of the questions that arose was about the kinds of family records South Peace Regional Archives is interested in. The answer might interest you, too!

A fairly large proportion of the records we hold at South Peace Regional Archives are records of families and individuals. Since we are a community archives and families and individuals are an essential part of any community, this makes sense. However, the kinds of records we receive from families and individuals can be disappointing because they often do not tell us very much about the person or family that created them. For instance, we often receive photographs, but photographs alone without other records leave a lot of holes in the story of the family. Archives are all about context and the wider number and variety of records, the fuller picture we get of the life of the family or individual.

The Archives is interested in all those records that document the life and activities of the family or individual, especially those that are created, received and accumulated by an individual or family as a natural and spontaneous result of their normal, every-day activities. What do we mean by "natural and spontaneous"? Well, think about the kinds of records that flow through your household today without you actively trying to gather them in. How do you keep track of what is happening in your life? Maybe you keep a journal or perhaps you have a daytimer or agenda book. How do you keep track of your finances? Maybe you have a household budget or accounts book. I'm sure all of you have filed an income tax return at some point or other. How do you communicate with the people who are important to you? Maybe you are a letter writer or perhaps you prefer email. What about legal documents? Do you have a deed for your house? A will? Agreements of any kind? How do you identify yourself? Do you have a birth certificate, baptismal certificate, driver's licence, marriage certificate, passport, etc? What are some of the accomplishments in your life? If you went to school you probably received a report card. Did you serve in the military? What kind of work did you do? Were you involved in any community groups or on boards? Do you have membership documents, certificates, or other records connected with any of these activities?

The Archives is also interested in records you may have created specifically to document your activities, such as scrapbooks, family history books or genealogies, photograph albums, and home movies and home videos.

Another way to look at the question of what to keep and donate is by examining the value of the records. In general, the records that should be kept are those with ongoing or historic value. Records can be kept for their evidential value: records that have a current and ongoing use, records that are evidence of personal activities, or records that are the only source of a particular piece of history.

Records may also be kept for their fiscal value, those records that document financial history, or legal value, those records that document legal rights. Some records are kept purely for their intrinsic value because they have an intangible value that makes them merit keeping.

(cont'd across page)

Society and Member News

Thanks to all who attended "Growing Up Albertan"

We will be having another film and story-telling night during Archives Week 2011 (first Saturday in October).

If you, your business, or your organization would like to be a sponsor for this event, please contact the Archives.

Is anyone interested in having a "Growing Up Albertan" event in their own community? Archives staff would be happy to bring the film clips.
You arrange the speakers.

Looking for Christmas gifts reflecting the history of this area?
South Peace Regional Archives has books, maps, and photographs

(cont'd from page 18)

If you are not sure what to keep and what to discard, ask the Archives for help. In fact, it is our preference for you to bring the entire collection in and we will go through it to determine what should be archived. The remainder of the collection will be returned to you.

To sum up this entire column in one sentence, the Archives is interested in personal records of all kinds that document the life and activities of you and your family. We hope that you and your records will be visiting us soon!

The stories in this issue are great examples of the kind of submissions we are looking to include in this newsletter. Do you have a story, or does someone you know have a story about the past in the south Peace? Submit it to us by mail or e-mail, or call us at 780-830-5105.

Recent Acquisitions

Monkman Pass Highway Material
Alex Watt, Secretary
Francis Watt and Jean Harris

Kirkham family photographs
Mary Kirkham

Oral History of Dr. Murray & Dr. Jim Carlisle
Dr. Jim Carlisle

Grande Prairie Ski Club records
Harvey Pearson and Ken Belke

Eaglesham & District Drama Club records
Greg Donaldson

Euphemia McNaught video tapes
Beaverlodge Cultural Centre

Christian Association Meeting records
Brock University

Sinclair family records
Estate of John Sinclair

Childs family album
Alfred Childs

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