

TELLING OUR STORIES

Volume 3, Issue 1, December 1, 2011

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The abbreviations of texting are nothing new, as we see from this ca. 1950 QSL card from the collection of Bob Field, SPRA fonds 477.

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Merry Christmas and Best Wishes for 2012!

December 1, 2011

Dear Members & Supporters;

The stories in this issue of our newsletter reflect the theme of "Community Life & Activities," and originated in the "Film & Story Night" put on by the Archives at the Golden Age Centre on October 1.

Two stories told that night, by Alice Fortier and Jean Rycroft, have been saved for future issues of the newsletter. We have substituted another story by Jean of how the community at Bad Heart came together in the face of a forest fire.

We appreciated the participation of our board members at the Film & Story Night, with president Irene Nicolson opening the festivities and Gord Mackey acting as Master of Ceremonies. Gord also took all of the photographs of the storytellers which have been used in this newsletter.

Looking back over 2011, we appreciate all of our volunteers. You will find them listed on the back page along with the projects they are working on.

We also appreciate all who have donated archival records over the past year. The QSL card on the front page is from the Bob Field fonds. This collection was donated by Marion Field and brought in by George Simpson.

QSL means "I confirm receipt of your transmission" in Quebec Sign Language and confirms two-way communication between two amateur or ham radio stations. The fonds documents Bob's hobby as a ham radio operator and contains 518 QSL cards from all over the world as well as many other records.

Thanks again for supporting the South Peace Regional Archives Society. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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.

Startling Results

by Jim Nelson



I am not an historian, or biographer - or archivist. I am a writer of fiction which may take the form of plays, books, or songs.

Pearl S. Buck quoted a Chinese proverb on the process of writing "fiction" which goes: "If I was to tell you the truth, I'd have to lie."

But, when you set out to "fictionalize" the story of a real person, a person well-known in your community, like the unforgettable Baldy Swanson, for instance, the lie is going to have to be pretty close to the truth to be believed - because Baldy, in real life, was unbelievable enough, with his distinctive features and "unique" characteristics.

A few years after Baldy had passed on - and was found to be missed - I set out to tell his story in play form, just as he had once dictated it to me for a magazine article. The deal was that I would not try to contradict, or correct, his version - and I didn't.

And the make-up crew, and the costume people, went to work and took a somewhat normal-looking man - Jim Geary - and shaved his head, and waxed his eyebrows (which must have hurt!) and with liberal applications of scar wax and clothing identical to the late Mr. Swanson's, Mr. Geary ended up a dead ringer.

And to add to the illusion, since we happened to be doing the show in a small theatre on Richmond Avenue, which backed onto the alley adjacent to the York Hotel - we decided that our Baldy would make his entrance directly from the real Baldy's Home Turf. A better set could not be imagined: a side door opened onto the alley with the York Tavern in the background.

However, to enter through this door, Mr. Geary would have to come out the stage door, cross a small recess about the size of a parking space, and wait for

his cue outside in the alley. But he couldn't hear the show from there, so I would stand at the stage door, listening, and give him a wave to indicate when he should break in on the audience.

All went well, until about the third night when I let Mr. Geary out the stage door as usual and, getting immersed in the stance, voice and attitude of the character, he had started ambling toward the other door when out of the corner of my eye I saw two figures amble into view in the alley, at about the same pace.

About the time that I realized that it was a man named Mike, who had been Baldy's faithful sidekick in that alley for years, Mike and his partner had spied Mr. Geary!

And they were in shock...

Mike raised his hands, eyes wide, and said "Baldy!" as though confirming the miracle - his partner looked ready to run. Whereupon Mr. Geary, not knowing what else to do, turned on them in Baldy's voice and told them to "Be quiet!" or they'd "wreck the whole thing!"

Mike, in double shock now that the apparition had spoken to him and used to taking orders from Baldy, remained quiet while Baldy, jumping his cue, scuttled through the door into the theatre and slammed it behind him. I watched Mike long enough, before my next cue was coming up, to confirm that Mike had been totally convinced that our lie was true.

South Eaglesham Mutual Telephone Co.

by Mathew Wozniak



On February 11, 1958, the first meeting was held of what later became "The South Eaglesham Mutual Telephone Co. Ltd." On February 21, representatives of Alberta Government Telephones were in attendance and laid out plans for telephone service. On February 25, 1958 we requested a permit to cut 800 telephone poles. The fall of 1958 all members that could went into the swamps to cut trees. There were areas where trees were about six feet tall and so thick one could not walk through between them, in other areas they were 20 to 30 feet tall. The patch we chose had trees about 6 inches in diameter and would make two telephone poles. We cut 16, 20 and 25 foot poles. We had a chain saw but most of the sawing was by hand. We hauled them to the yard of Louis Larson and in the spring we had enough volunteers to peel them. When dry we coated them with diesel fuel and Penta.

After harvest that fall we attached the side brackets, screwed on the glass insulators. Drilled holes in the ground and stood the poles up and then attached the wires. We had to keep transposing the wires to minimize picking up voltage from power lines. Because of the possibility of lightning strikes, we had to install lightning arrestors at each home. The majority of our lines were attached to Alberta Government poles where cross arms had to be attached. We had just finished installing the poles along the Codesa Road when they decided to widen the road and we had to move our line sixteen and a half feet (one rod).

The phones had a cradle on the left side for the receiver and mouth piece much like we use now; on the right side was a crank that when turned caused every telephone bell on that line to ring. A 9 volt

battery supplied the power to transmit the voice. If one pressed the button on the

left side of the telephone box while turning the crank, it would ring at the switchboard and the operator would connect one to long distance or if it was to some one on the other line, she would ring that number and connect them. All subscribers on that line could listen and talk at once. Two short rings was R102 or 202 depending which line you were on, 3 shorts was 3, 4 shorts was 4, 5 was one long ring, 6 was 1 long and short, 7 was a long and 2 shorts, 10 was 2 long rings, 11 was 2 longs and 1 short, 12 was 2 longs and 2 shorts. A short ring when finished using the phone let everyone know that the line was open. We had 13 phones on each line. The rate was \$3.00 per month plus long distance calls. I was secretary and typed all the bills and addressed the envelopes. A picture of a bill is in the Eaglesham History book.

Because of a family quarrel between two brothers and their wives, who knew that when their phone rang, the other people could and likely would listen to their conversations, they did not subscribe and all the Four Mile Creek area, east of a line directly south of Eaglesham and south of Highway 49 were without telephone service.

The operator worked from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. After she closed, she would connect both lines together so if a person wanted to talk to someone on line one, they would ring two long, long rings then the regular call rings. Every one could listen to all the conversations and some did. A lot. Once in a while

someone would forget that all could hear them and give the kids orders to do something.

At road allowances, the Northern Alberta Railroad used longer poles so moving farm machinery was no problem, but in the middle of a quarter section they made gates and laid planks between the rails but did not use longer poles. We had a young man named Donny who crossed the railroad track with cultivator wings up and forgot to look up. Result—quarter of a mile down the field he was dragging telephone wire, and this is serious. If the locomotive engineers don't get orders as to where they have to meet other trains, they don't move. We phoned their office in McLennan but there was a wedding that night and they thought it was a prank call and ignored it. The next day a young man on a speeder (what crews used to get around) came from Grande Prairie looking for this break.

In February 1963, a motion was passed that we accept the 14 new members on line 3 on the condition that they acquire the necessary easements, clear the right-of-ways and pay \$3.50 a month for 10 years. On August 17, 1963 we accepted the bid from Cookshaw Electric to install 17 miles of pressure treated poles and 2 miles on AGT poles. In spite of the required number of transpositions

(lines switched positions) line 3 had 110 volts on it from running parallel to power lines. That made servicing the line a bit tricky because there wasn't any way to turn it off. One had to be careful not to touch both lines at once. Ole Emerson and me, Mathew Wozniak, were appointed as linesmen at \$2.50 an hour. Whatever I had to do, when up on a pole, it had to be done with one hand because I had to hang on with the other one. They gave us an ohmmeter that was so sensitive that if the lines were touching, we could tell how far away it was. One day after a thunderstorm I was driving to Eaglesham and saw what looked like a 1 x 2 inch white lumber on the road. Returning, I notice that lightning had struck 6 poles in a row and one pole was shattered so there was only about 6 feet left and the cross arms with the 6 wires were hanging about 8 feet from the ground. The other poles were split and chunks taken out of them but they were standing.

In the fall of 1965, Alberta Government Telephones plowed in lines and installed automatic switchboards that were more efficient than human operators and were on duty all the time. Without these automatic switching devices, telephone service as we have it would not be possible. On March 2, 1966, we asked the Minister of Telephones to

revoke our license to provide telephone service. The last bills were written on May 20, 1967. The lines were rolled up and poles divided among the members. Now we had uninterrupted service that was not affected by weather or proximity to power lines.



At left, two women on the switchboard for the Wanhams Mutual Telephone Company around 1930. SPRA 016.01

An Experience in Community Education

by Gloria Davis

Ah, yes, you remember – “the 60’s” – LSD, free love, beer fests, finding yourself, marijuana. Well that was not Hythe in the 60’s – and for that I was thankful. No worries about beer fests for sure, as in my first interview with Mr. Smith, our principal, he stressed three main points – no going to the local beer parlor, dress appropriately for class, and he would be monitoring our classes via the intercom.



I was fresh out of 2 years at U of A, a country girl from Elsworth, and began teaching in May of 1960 under the guidance of Mrs. Anderson in grade 2 and Mrs. Sawchuk with grade 8. It was a great experience to watch the expertise of these two great teachers – how they handled the workers, the non-workers, the silent ones, the talkers. It was the beginning of my real education. They each took time to teach, to tell what I could do better, to make me feel a part of the school life of the Hythe Elementary and Junior High School. The teachers of Hythe were a community unto themselves as many had taught in that school or in the area since their beginnings. They knew the families, the expectations of both the children and the parents. They had the respect of both and knew that if one child

of the family was misbehaving, soon the wireless telephone would be working and the child would be corrected.

In September of 1960, I was assigned a grade 7 class of 35 pupils. They were ages 12 to 16 – yes 16 – two fellows had not been advanced to keep up with their age group. One of these fellows was the grandson of our janitor and therefore had access to the furnace room, a dark place in the basement, to which I also gained access as he smoked down there and had to be rooted out!! The other fellow often fell asleep in class as the family had a heavy round of chores before school began. This, as a farm girl, I could relate to, so he snoozed through the story time after lunch!!!

It is hard to exemplify the close knit communion of that first class – they had been together since grade one, their families were often intermarried and related, so to be accepted as a new leader took innovative teaching, took playing games for 15 minutes at the end of the day if everyone had their work completed, took bringing snacks for a mock tea party once a month, took many hours of class preparation to motivate the slower ones, captivate the faster ones and keep the middle moving along. But it was fun – I was young, had energy and a great teacher Mrs. MacAulay who was teaching a split grade 6 and 7 next door. She kept her eye on me, checked progress, made suggestions, had me out to supper to talk school, community, families, problems and solutions.

But your teaching did not end at the end of the school day nor did your image as a teacher end at the end of the school day. I lived with a widow and her daughter who was teaching at Beaverlodge. Mrs. Cavanagh had friends of her age who came to tea every Wednesday afternoon. Things were discussed and depending on the volume of the discussion, the budgie’s cage was often covered when we got home from school as he would screech if the volume was too high. The boyfriend did not visit during the week. The dress was just that – a dress or skirt, nylons, hair done, not too much makeup. Pants could be worn under the skirt while walking

6 blocks to school in the winter but were removed once you arrived. Jeans were only for cowgirls and farmers, and shorts – well, forget it. My grandmother had already taught me that!!

I became part of the Hythe community – recognized in the stores, leader of the CGIT, wreath-layer on November 11 at the old theatre. Sometimes you were lassoed into community events – such as the CGIT. Their former leader was tired – recognized new blood in Sig Solty, another new teacher, and suddenly we were leaders of 15 grade 7 to 9 girls. We had weiner roasts, hikes in the pouring rain, made cookies and had bake sales, had candlelight services in the old United Church and learned to be good examples for “our girls”. Sometimes we broke free, ignored traditions, but we were careful and mindful of our responsibilities. It was good.

And then in 1961 I was again teaching grade 7 when on a cold day in February, Mr. Smith called in to say I would be transferring to the High School tomorrow as the Phys Ed teacher had got upset at a basketball tournament over the week end and had packed up and gone back to California. So my real education as teacher began with 30 grade 10 boys in one room and 35 girls in another room for Social, English, Biology. I also had Biology 30, Geography 10, and Music 10, 20, 30. The cupboard in the boys classroom revealed stacks of unmarked essays – not a sign of a teacher’s manual – nor a sign of what had been taught so far.

But again the community of teachers pitched in. Mr. Smith, who was a social teacher of many years, spent time after school helping with projects, literally teaching me how to teach Social 10. The discipline – yes of course the classes did not always go smoothly – was interesting. I was thankful for 6 feet of height and red hair and one of my teachers at University taught us how to throw a tantrum of great magnificence, terrifying the sturdiest of boys, and then to walk out of the class to laugh at the expressions on their respective faces. It worked and I worked and learned. And if things were getting somewhat out of hand it was always that moment

when the voice from the intercom would say, “do you need a hand with anything” and his hand was not without a strap if need be. The classroom would be silent – the pupils called him God. Respect – that is what we had – we earned it but basically we worked for it, got it and worked to keep it.

I went back to University after my 2 years in Hythe for my 3rd and 4th years and my degree in Education. I went back with a different attitude to classes during those last 2 years. I knew I was going back to Hythe to teach High School again so everything had a different slant. Teaching in the community of Hythe was an excellent grounding for 25 years spent teaching, learning, leading, motivating, yelling, crying over failures, rejoicing over 52% - a pass mark for a student who had been lagging at 40 all year, gaining respect for students and parents and other teachers. It was good – I would do it again!!! The community of Hythe still feels like home to me as some of the business people, some now retired, were former students and you always feel welcomed and remembered.

Clipping From the Audio Files

Jean Sask tells about receiving Christmas parcels from the I.O.D.E when they were homesteading along the Alberta-BC border in the 1930s:

“The I.O.D.E. in Duncan, BC sent parcels of clothing right to us. At first, it was second-hand clothing. My mother made it over. Anything that was too big, she made over into coats or dresses. Sweaters she unraveled and re-knit into mitts and socks. And then they wrote and asked our sizes and sent some new clothing. They always sent a parcel at Christmas-time with used toys and different things. I remember one year, they wanted to know what each one of us wanted for Christmas. My older sister wanted a purse, and I wanted fancy hankies. And we both got what we asked for. But, we also got a lot of other things, a set of china, dishes and toy dishes and a necklace and things like this.”

Life in the Nurses' Residence

by Nora Hassall

The nurses' residence, built in 1937, was a few steps west of the old Grande Prairie Municipal Hospital. The residence housed nurses employed by the hospital, as well as a suite for the hospital matron. It had a small kitchen and a lovely huge living room complete with a fireplace.

My first encounter was in 1954 after graduation to work at the hospital. We were paid \$200 a month less \$20 for room & board. The residence had hot water heating and the clanking noise that made was a problem for sleeping.

To say that the residence occupants were a boon to the young men of Grande Prairie is an understatement. Many girls, who came here to nurse, married Grande Prairie males. One memory I have is when the local RCMP officers used to come to the second floor of the hospital at night for coffee. One night they arrived with hard snow balls. It seems one of their officers was dating a nurse and they were parked behind the residence. Somehow, maybe from the fire escape, they pelted the car with snow balls. They probably thought they were being shot at. The next day the patients commented on how "noisy" it had been in the night.

After returning to Grande Prairie in 1957, my next encounter was to attend AARN meetings in the lounge at the residence. Our monthly meetings included speakers, planning blood donor clinics and our Christmas parties at Joe's Corner Coffee Shop. We had a tea wagon and china cups and saucers which were always used.

My third encounter with the residence was with the Red Cross Loan Cupboard and Home Care Project. This project started in 1959, and with it came the loan cupboard which included everything from bedpans to wheelchairs to beds! This was in

my family's care for 20 years—mostly stored in our garage and home. However, sometime in the 70s, rooms on the second floor of the residence became available. At that point the Health Unit was on the ground floor, and the second floor had Rev. Jim Beal's Counseling Service plus a small hearing clinic plus the Loan Cupboard (about 15 wheel chairs).

My not so favorite memory is of those heavy old gatch beds that rolled up at the head and foot! They were the most heavy, awkward things you can ever imagine. Probably because we couldn't turn them in the stairwell we had to lower them over the edge of the fire escape with ropes attached. In the winter the fire escape was covered with snow and ice. It was not a job for the faint of heart.

Happily, in 1980 Red Cross opened an office in Grande Prairie and another era ended—no more Loan Cupboard to look after.

I have fond memories of what was an essential part of Grande Prairie for many years.



Nurses in front of the fireplace in the living room of the Nurses' Residence in 1947. SPRA 2007.05.05

The Old Swimming Hole

By Gord Pearcy

This story is about the old swimming hole in the Creek Flats, now called Muskoseepi Park. There are a couple of items that need to be clarified. First, you had to be a boy, male—no girls allowed as it was a “skinny dipping” hole. Second, you would have to be born in the time period of 1924 to 1935. Otherwise you are too old or too young.

For you younger ones born after 1935, the Swimming Hole was located on Bear Creek about 100 yards west and north of the present Muskoseepi Park Pool. It was on a nice wide bend on the creek. As I recall, it was one of two to enjoy, the second one somewhere in the south end.

But we enjoyed a large flat area. It was somewhat hidden from view by the surrounding creek banks and brush. I say somewhat hidden because we didn't want girls to come swimming, for obvious reasons, and we didn't want our mothers to see us too plainly from their view at the top of the banks that were located where St. Joseph's Church now stands.

You see, we could see the mothers looking for us for meal times, or chores, etc., but they were hesitant to come down the steep slopes to harass us. We could see them, though, which gave us an edge as we could scoot home via the hill off 103 Avenue and stay out of trouble, or through secret paths through the bush.

Mothers, though, are clever souls, so they found a way to beat the escape routes. In that time frame, you find out just how fast your mother can run. You learn to be quick when there was an 18" ruler on the end of a long arm!!! And getting home ahead of mother meant a “safe haven”, most times.

If you were Mrs. Ike Nelson you didn't have to come to the rim of the hill. She could stand on the front porch of their home at 101st Street and 104th Avenue and yell loud enough to be heard at the swimming hole. Ernie, Eddie and Archie knew when

she called! The fourth son was Walter and that was tough to yell.

But I digress. We were an active bunch but not very organized. When the bend in the creek was not deep enough, we built a dam, inserted a 2 x 12 plank into the bank and had a diving board. Not too sophisticated, but it served the purpose until a heavyweight messed things up!

It was really quite solitary, so we thought. Downstream about 200 yards stood the Lanctot home. Their boys were fun types too. One of the Lanctot boys decided to lead a group of girls around the bend at a most inopportune time. Man, did the scurrying get into high gear!

The old swimming hole ceased to exist after 1945. That was when the Kinsmen Club and the community built a regular pool right behind the AGT office on 101st Street and 99th Avenue. They piped hot water for the pool across the street from the Canadian Utilities Power Plant.

The area just west of St. Joseph's Church, before you got to the swimming hole, had been designated by the town as a recreation area, and believe it or not there were cabins built and a dirt road system. However, I do not recall ever seeing anyone from out of town ever use the so-called Auto Court. On the other hand, the area was well used as a playground for all kinds of fun and games.

The roads leading down to the Auto Court were used during the winter months as sleighing and skiing hills. The 103rd Avenue hill and Tanner's Hill were favorites, but that is another story, for another time.





One of our major projects for the Summer of 2011 was to get our 8mm and 16mm film collection in order and properly described. That work paid off when we were able to use several clips from the Foster, Wood, Wozniak, Stojan, Marcy, James, and Tieman families and the Eaglesham Board of Trade at the Film and Story Night. Since the film clips were silent, Leslie Pearson (right) provided informative and humorous commentary.



The film strip on the left shows still samples of a few of the clips:

Even the Fire Department has to blow off steam now and again. In this clip from the Wood family film, they followed up several heats of hose-laying contests with a big water fight, using fire hoses! It's not real clear in this photo, but the spectators had to duck several times.

A basketball game, from the Foster family film, played by a group of boys and girls on an outside court was full of fun as the ball bounced in unpredictable directions over the uneven ground.

Then it was off to the races. After seeing stock car races, we were presented with car races of another kind – a little more bare-bones – from the Foster family.

More fun with the Foster family. It's a day at the river, which included not only a picnic and sandcastle building, but also a chance to wash the family car!

A favourite winter activity, tobogganing down a steep hill! Numerous runs and accidents were captured on film by the Wood family, but perhaps the most spectacular crash was that of these two boys, standing on their sleds and racing down the hill one right after the other. Ouch!

More winter fun, this time at the snowmobile races as filmed by the Wozniak family. In the middle of the scene, and in great danger of being run over by the racers, is the intrepid flag man, risking life and limb to ensure that the racers know which lap they're on.

2011 Film & Story Night

On October 1, 2011, more than one hundred people joined us at the Golden Age Centre to hear twelve guest speakers tell stories about their experiences of community life in the south Peace River Country.

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 1-8, 2011) archives in Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Banff and St. Albert presented film nights, public lectures and other events to invite people in and share their unique holdings.

The ASA website, www.archivesalberta.org, features a virtual exhibit, "Archives in Living Colour" which demonstrates that, contrary to common belief, Alberta's archives are filled with colour photographs, hand-tinted images, watercolours, advertising art, and architectural drawings, many in vibrant, stunning, colours. These images were drawn from the holdings of 23 archival institutions around the province.

Guest speakers at the South Peace Regional Archives event were given a 2012 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 2011.

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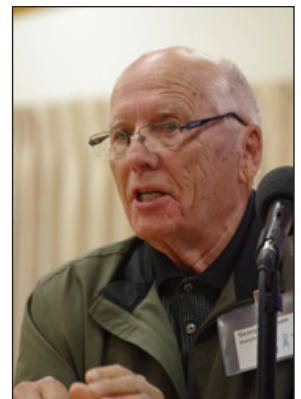
for sponsoring our "Film & Story Night, and to

Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune

for a lovely feature article.



Several of our storytellers told their stories from memory rather than having them in written form. Bob Wallace entertained us with incidents from his days of refereeing hockey. George Simpson told us about the day he used the entire town's water supply to fill up the swimming pool, and Jenny Tetreau kept us in stitches with her stories about "Both Sides of the Curtain."



Grande Prairie Music Festival

by Margaret Bowes

The festival was first initiated by the “Women’s Music Club” in the early 1920s. Mr. A.E. Galway, Mrs. F. Barber-Smith and Mr. L.B. Yule, Superintendent of Schools were the active organizers of the festival. The festival was then held yearly from 1932 to 1945. In 1927 Peace River and Grande Prairie held a joint festival in Grande Prairie, and an attempt was made in the 1960s to rotate festivals between Grande Prairie and Dawson Creek but in both cases this was discontinued because of the travel involved. In 1945 Grande Prairie Festival became non-competitive and because of the caliber of performances and general decline in interest there were no festivals held between 1949-1951.

In 1959 school teacher Martin Intscher undertook, with renewed interest in the community, the re-establishment of music festivals with the assistance of the Allied Arts Council and the Grande Prairie School District Board. The next festival was held in 1962 and annual festivals have been held since that date.

The success of the festival is due to the continuing support from the community and individuals who provide scholarships, to EnCana who has been a major sponsor of the festival since 1998, to the Grande Prairie Regional College for allowing us to use their facilities for the festival, and to local churches and Second Street Theatre who have also allowed us to use their buildings for the festival.

I can recall in the “old days” when we had festival classes in

the “Old” Capitol Theatre building which was located where the Park Hotel was on Richmond Avenue. We were all quite content to

play our piano pieces on an old upright piano with some of the ivory missing from a few keys. Short plays were also performed in the festival and Jean O’Brien’s junior high Choral Speech performances were always given “rave” reviews by the adjudicators for “The Highwayman” and “The Congo”. Just ask Roy Borstad or Nancy McDonald! Solo speech classes and other solo entries were also held in the old Speke Hall next to the Anglican Church on 99th Avenue and 102nd Street. One year we also



Grande Prairie High School Glee Club directed by Mr. Kujath ca. 1947.
SPRA 2005.43.01

had several festival sessions in the old Grande Prairie High School where the Provincial Building is located. It was an interesting time as we used the gymnasium and periodically the bells would ring to change classes in the rest of the school!

I also remember the great amount of time Mr. Kujath, principal of the school, spent training several trios for the festival. Jean O'Brien accompanied us and Mr. Kujath would practice with us at 8 in the morning before school, at lunch time and after school. I sang with Margaret Neufeld and Mary Remple, Ruth Leggatt, Nora Sherk, Judy Moe, Alice O'Brien, Mary Jean Carlisle, Marjorie Smith and many others still remember the songs they sang. One year Bill Minchin, Gerry Duncan, Dave Howes, Deane Toews, Joe Lowe and Sam Lowe sang a double trio.

My mother, Jean O'Brien, always had us play the piano in the festival and I can remember my mother, sister Erin, and I listening to Alice playing: "The Little White Donkey". Alice always played from memory and she began very well, but we realized that she was playing the first two or three lines over and over and then finally made the change to the rest of the piece and finished well. Alice said she was so nervous her mind just went blank, but finally because of so much practice her fingers finally proceeded where they should go!

We used to have great competition between the Grande Prairie High School choir and St. Joe's High School. Mr. Kujath conducted the GPHS choir and Sister Lucy St. Joe's choir. There was great celebration when GPHS or St. Joe's defeated the other!

I hope the Music Festival continues to thrive for many more years.

Alice Braumberger's Recollections of The Bad Heart Fire

as told by Jean Rycroft

Prelude

In May 2010 I was privileged to relate the story of Ferne Parker and her remarkable escape from the Bad Heart bush fire on May 4, 1944, and how Ferne managed to save the lives of four of her children against almost insurmountable odds. That same fire had already proven fatal to two young men who were fighting that fire at Sanborn's Mill: Wilfred Derocher and Raphael Klein. (Telling Our Stories, Vol. 1, Issue 3, June 1, 2010, pgs. 12 – 16)

Alice's story is about that same fire that raged all day long incinerating everything in its path as it swept through from Webster to the Bad Heart area. It illustrates the courage displayed by individuals in the face of great adversity – and the community spirit which brings them all together to reach out to one another.

Alice Braumberger was a young married woman living out on a farm in the Bad Heart area with her husband Bruno and their three small children, when she experienced the terrible fire of May 4, 1944.

Alice, now 91 years of age, has a fantastic memory. Although she has trouble hearing, her memory is very sharp. As her daughter Shirley Milinkovic says, "It has never been necessary for any of us to use our memories because Mom has such an incredible memory that we all just ask her." The following story brings that memory to life, as Alice reminisces about that horrific day sixty-seven years ago.

"It had been a terribly dry, hot spring. That fire had been smoldering over there, somewhere north of Webster for quite a while, as we would see the

smoke. Trix Willis was the fire ranger and he was up there with his men. No one thought it could move that fast, but then a terrific wind came up, the biggest wind that had ever hit the Peace River Country. By noon the sky was getting dark from the smoke, the whole outside was getting very dark. At about 3:00 we had to light the lamp in the house as it was pitch dark, black just like midnight.

“Bruno [her husband] was out in the pig house fixing up a grain chopper. He came in to the house and his eyes were already smarting so he could hardly see his way. We were deciding what to do. There were animals running across the yard: we saw deer, rabbits, coyotes and even the birds were flying ahead of the wild fire. Bruno was outside watching the sparks because there were burning branches of spruce already flying through the air. The fire was coming fast, what a helpless feeling!

“I didn’t know what to do. I had the three little kids gathered right around me. Ernie was almost five, but his knee was bad so he was lame. It was just getting better, but I would have to carry him. Rose was just three in March and little Ray was about 22 months. I was so scared. Then I looked out the window and I could see this truck coming in the blackness. I’ll never forget that sight. It had just one light and we knew who it was right away. There was Eric Rycroft with his old ton and a half mail truck. He had a grain box on the flat deck and he was driving around gathering up the women and kids.

“He had already picked up my mother (Gladys Hennigar) and my sister (Eva Sparks). My mother had stopped the Parker kids on their way home from school (Pat, George and Alma). The teacher had dismissed them at noon and they were going to rush home. They were crying so Mom took them



Alice Braumberger with her horse Teddy. Photo from Braumberger family

into her house and Eric had them all with him. When the teacher at Bad Heart School let the kids go, they had to go through the middle of the fire. The Rycroft kids (Geneva, Sam & Phyllis) were all ok because they could stick to a horse like nothing and were able to go home, but the Parker kids were on foot so it is lucky that they made it to my Mom’s.

“Eric ran to our door and said, “Quick, get out of here as fast as you can!” I had to carry poor little Ernie and told Rose and Ray to hold onto my skirt as I had a dress on.

“My mom wanted to get out of the front, to let me sit there as I was expecting a baby, but I said, “No, I’ll get up into the back with the others”, and I did.

“By then the whole farm was on fire. You could see everything burning. I remember the spokes of the wagon burning, the flames were spreading right up the wheels. It’s funny the things you remember.

“Arnold Sparks had come racing down on horseback to tell everybody to get out – the fire had burned everything at his place, so he stayed with Bruno to fight the fire at our place. They kept throwing water on the house, but the smoke was so bad, hard on the eyes and lungs. Big branches of



Chris Hennigar holding Ray, Gladys and Art Hennigar, Eva Sparks holding Melvin, Arnold Sparks, Alice with little Ernie, Rose, Lawrence, Wes and Fred Hennigar. Photo taken by Bruno. Photo courtesy of the Braumberger family

spruce trees kept burning, breaking off, being carried along by that terrible wind and burning ahead of the main fire. They had to keep trying to put those out too."

Son Ernie recalled the burning tree tops flying through the air as they hurried to get to the truck.

Alice continued "Eric picked up more women and kids as we went along. There must have been 30 people in all and they didn't have a very big house, but they took us all in. The fire had gone to the north of Rycrofts and because the wind was from the southwest, it blew all the black smoke away so they could see better. So there we were – it was about 6 o'clock in the evening by then.

"Of course, Reta (Eric's wife) didn't have food for that many, so she had to send the bigger kids riding to the neighbours in every direction for a mile or two away and they were good. They saw the fire and knew what was wrong, all the people around sent what they had: Annie Moen, Brooks and all our neighbours. I remember one roast or ham, eggs, milk, butter, bread, so we could all have our supper.

"There was one other bed and Reta told me and the three little kids to take it, so we did.

"My dad (Chris Hennigar) and Abner Graham stumbled in about midnight and they layed down in one corner. There were 17 young people and kids lying on the living room floor. They put their jackets under their heads – everybody was exhausted and full of smoke. My dad's voice was so full of smoke, he could barely talk. He was so worried because he

didn't know where my younger brother Art was.

"Dad and Ab had walked out from my dad's mill, about six miles across country.

"Art (who was 17 at the time) and Norman Ray (who was 16) had left the Hennigar Sawmill earlier in the day. They had been working there and they knew the fire was coming, but nobody realized just how quickly it would travel. My dad had just bought a brand new Ford truck with a flat deck for hauling lumber and the boys tried to save it.

"They started out with the big truck and a team of horses to pull it through the mud holes, sloughs and wet spots. They did the best they could, but when the horses fell down dead from exhaustion and smoke inhalation they were helpless to go any further, so they were forced to leave the truck to burn, as the fire had caught up to them. Then the boys had to worry about saving their own lives.

"I remember there was George Love and Jiggs Erno and someone else walking out too. George Love had a heart condition and he was unable to go any further. He dropped down and even though they were running for their lives, Art and Norman

wouldn't leave George. The two boys half-dragged, half-carried him out to the road where the highway is now. They were coming east on that road and managed to save George's life. (Editor's note: That fire brought out the very best in some people and the valiant act of these two young men, who risked their own lives to save a friend, was definitely one of them.)

Alice continued, "It was quite a strain on everyone that night at Rycrofts: everyone was so worried because we thought that many people had perished in the fire. My Mom was so worried about Art and Norman, and I was worried about Bruno as well as my brother and father. Nobody thought they would ever see Ferne Parker again – or her three younger children: Effie, Joan and Gordon and older son Wimpy. Little Alma (grade one) was crying all night because she was sure her Mom was dead."

Ernie Braumberger, who was five at the time, added, "There were no phones and no way to communicate so everybody was worried about the men and some of the kids that were missing."

Alice added, "My Mom was so relieved the next day when she found out that Art and Norman had managed to walk out ahead of the fire, and in fact were sleeping at the Hennigar home, which was still standing. Even though the fire had burned my Dad's whole timber berth, logs, planed lumber and the entire mill site, his new truck and his team of horses, the house was still standing. My Mom, who had been crying the night before because she thought that Art and Norman were dead, now cried tears of joy when she saw they were alive. The fire had been so hot that even the rims of some plastic glasses in Art's pocket were melted down.

"My sister Eva and her husband Arnold Sparks, who lived just east of the Hennigar Mill, lost everything – their whole farm, house, barn, all the out-buildings and livestock. They even lost the bedding and blankets that they had put down the well to try to save them. Because the well had wooden cribbing, and the fire was so hot, the cribbing caught on fire and the bedding burned with it. They had

nothing left. All of their life's work was gone in one afternoon. Arnold & Eva moved into a little house belonging to bachelor Oliver Moen, until they got a new home.

"It was such a loss to everyone. My Mom and Dad had come out here from Nova Scotia with nothing in 1928 and worked so hard to set up the mill. I was only eight at the time. The Rays had come with us as they lived close to us in Nova Scotia, and now everybody had lost everything, but they were just so relieved that we were all alive.

"The next morning Bruno came to Rycroft's and took us home. Our wagon was burned so he must have brought the stone-boat or something. They had managed to save our house, but our big barn, two full granaries of wheat, a pile of lumber to build a new house, the hog house & some pigs and four horses had burned. I think the horses were running and the black smoke got them.

Just five days later our son Larry was born at Johanna's Maternity Home in Sexsmith, on May 9, 1944. I think we got a ride in with Ole Strid.

We came home in May and we moved away from there in December. Bruno wanted to move closer to town because Ernie was starting school. He bought the farm from Mike Antonio, who lived on the Webster road (& RR 61). There was a big barn as well as a big house."

Although Alice insisted that they didn't move because of the fire, she stated emphatically that she has always insisted that none of her children build their homes near spruce trees because she felt that the Hennigar house was spared only because there were no spruce trees near it.

When asked if she had suffered any nightmares after the fire Alice replied with a smile, "I hate fires and always will, but I had no time for any nightmares. I was too busy."

Such was the resilience of our pioneer women. Alice and Bruno went on to raise a family of ten children: two daughters and eight sons.

Community Involvement

by Wanda Zenner

The word “community” is derived from a Latin word “Communitas” which meant “together and gift”. Today the word encompasses intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs which affect the identity of the participants and their degree of cohesiveness. The common usage of the word community indicates a large group living in close proximity.

With the settling of the Peace Region in the early 20th century, communities began to dot the horizon – so was born the Community of Bezanson. While the residents were mainly farmers, there were certainly a wide range of professions present and the community was fortunate enough to have doctors and nurses in their midst. Everyone would know that their neighbors and the residents soon realized that much more could be accomplished if you worked together, bringing their specific skill sets. It was very common for work-bees to build log homes and of course everyone has heard of the barn raising events where there certainly would be a celebration after the construction was complete. Once established, the residents would then turn their attention to the construction of local entertainment centres and churches. Early stores were often operated out of a community member’s home along with post-offices. The Glen Leslie Church is a prime example of residents who gathered to discuss the idea of building a church mainly by volunteer labour and materials. As logs need to be ‘seasoned’ before they can be used effectively, Dan Minchin donated the logs that he had on hand with the intention of building a barn. Once the church was built in 1915 the Community once again came together and replaced the logs for Mr. Minchin. Many events were facilitated in the Church and in fact the Church was used as the Somme School from 1918 to 1928. The Church has now been designated as a Provincial Historic Site. If only the original builders were still

here to witness that event. The ladies of the area who are always a very valuable resource in any community, formed various clubs however all with the same mandate “the betterment of the community”.



In 1923 the Bezanson Community decided they needed a Hall to hold various community events specifically dances. Once again by means of mainly volunteer labor and materials construction began. The community was so enthused with the idea of a hall that the first dance was held when the walls were only 3 logs high. The area had many talented residents who were more than willing to form orchestras and play well into the early morning hours.

Being able to provide educational opportunities was very important to any community however in the early 1950’s the County of Grande Prairie centralized many of the small one-room schools and Bezanson and the surrounding area was no exception. The Community was very excited to hear that a new four-room school would be built in the hamlet in 1957. However, as the County did not have sufficient funds in their budget to build a teacherage, the Community came up with a proposal whereby they would provide the labour if the County could provide the materials. Local residents worked in rotation shifts to complete the project in

3 weeks. In July 1955 the teacherage was finished just in time for the fall term.

Not only does a community come together to celebrate the happy occasions such as weddings, showers, anniversaries but it is there for the sad occasions in life. In 1954, Archie Delaney of the Kleskun Hill area died from a tractor accident. At one time, there were 17 tractors in action, taking off the crop and finishing the fall work for the widow and her four children. When Mrs. Delaney decided to move to Grande Prairie, the Legion, neighbors and relatives assisted in the construction of her new home. Again in 1958, tragedy struck another resident when Vern Patterson lost his life in a farm accident. Shortly after the funeral, 80 community residents worked tirelessly to take off the hay crop.

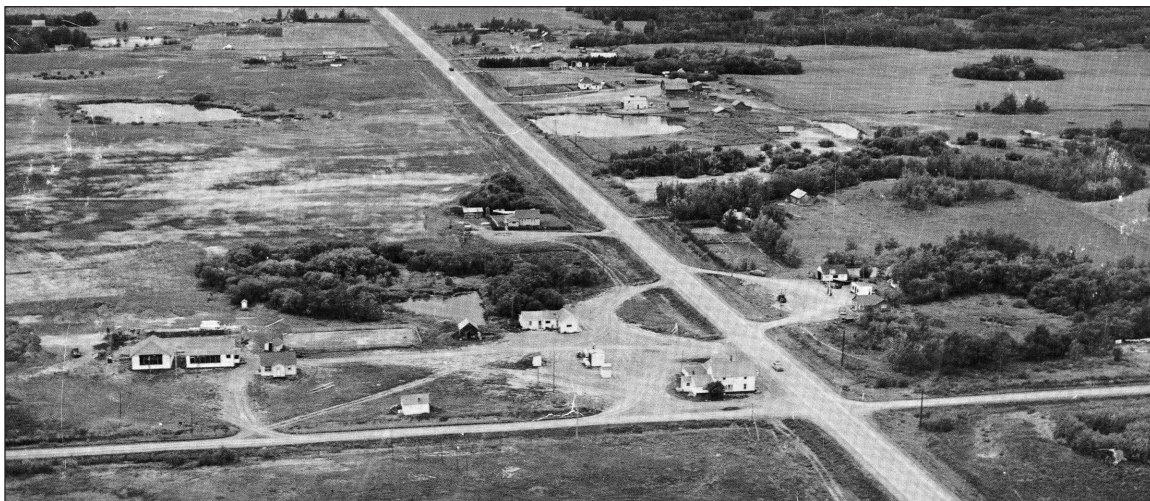
In the early 1980's the Bezanson Ag Society organized a committee to research the historical aspect of the old Bezanson Townsite. A monumental amount of work, all volunteer, went into the project and the Townsite received its designation as a Registered Historic Resource by the Province in 1986. In 1988, the Old Bezanson Townsite and Park was opened and is a favorite camping area for many.

You have a certain "feeling" when you are part of a community. You know that in good times and

bad there is always someone there to share in the joys and sorrows that life throws at us. Only in a community setting will you find such an outpouring of concern when a tragedy happens. I will never forget when my father passed away how the neighbors were there for me – someone was always showing up with a wonderful prepared meal.

In our hectic, face-paced, consumer driven society, it is common to feel overwhelmed, isolated and alone. However, with a community there is a sense of belonging. We can all begin by doing small things such as looking out for our neighbors. I can remember vividly while growing up, how my father would check to make sure there was smoke coming out of an elderly neighbor's chimney as that was the sign that all was OK in the cold winter months. Even this past winter, which I'm sure, must have set records for snow and cold, one of my neighbors would check to make sure I could get out of my driveway in order to get to work. This how change takes place, not from above but from within. By taking any active role in our communities, we can have a deeper sense of meaning and purpose and the community is stronger for our efforts.

Below, an aerial view of the hamlet of Bezanson in 1958. Photograph courtesy of Wanda Zenner.



New at the Archives

On www.southpeacearchives.org

World War I & II databases of soldiers who enlisted from the south Peace or settled here after the wars. Check it out and let us know if anyone in your family is missing from the list!

Community Life & Activities Photo Display created for Archives Week 2011 can be viewed in the Grande Prairie Museum community room or on our website by clicking on "Photo Displays" left side of home page.

Recent Acquisitions

Peace River Cooperative Seed Growers fonds
Jean Harris Gray

Civil Defense Literature
Diane Lindblom

Reminisings of Bennie (Bjorn) Velve
Mona Brown

Wapit School records of Alan McQuarrie
Dennis McIntosh

Rural Electification Association Maps
Charlie Wales

Davis, Hodgson, Coulter fonds
Charles Cairns

Canuck School, Bear Lake Hall, the Stone House stories and photographs
Sharon Brown Annis

Health Units of Alberta
Judy Anderson

Beaverlodge Women of Unifarm
Dalton Longson

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Would you like to receive it mailed to your home 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. You can also give memberships as gifts to friends or family.

Submissions to this Newsletter

SPRA Society encourages submissions in the form of stories, poems, memories, letters. 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.

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Society and Member News

Thank You 2011 Volunteers!

Thank you
Marie Mencke
Cathy Van Everdink
Betty Welter
Ursula Lewis

for all the time you save us in doing helpful tasks such as condensing school registers, and for being so accommodating in all you do.

Thank you Martin Peterson for your dedicated commitment to entering County and Greenview survey plan details into a searchable database.

Thank you Gail Prette for taking over the project of keeping our reference files in order. Did you hear the collective sigh of relief?

Thank you Kathryn Auger for transcribing the Isabel Campbell newspaper index for "Organizations". Watch for this new resource on our website in the new year.

Thank you Carol Gray for the many years you have spent doing data entry for the museum and archives.

We Love You All!

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 20th, 2012 at the Archives.

Come explore your roots.