

TELLING OUR STORIES

Volume 11

JUNE 2020

Issue 3

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

BIRD'S EYE VIEW
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

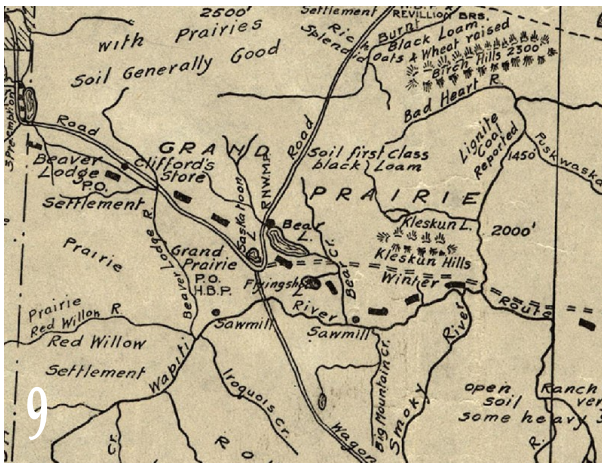
**SPEEDY BIRD
GETS THE WORM**
PIGEON RACING IN
THE SOUTH PEACE

CEREAL BOX CANARIES
UNRAVELLING AN
ARCHIVAL MYSTERY

WELCOME TO
SWAN CITY
GRANDE PRAIRIE

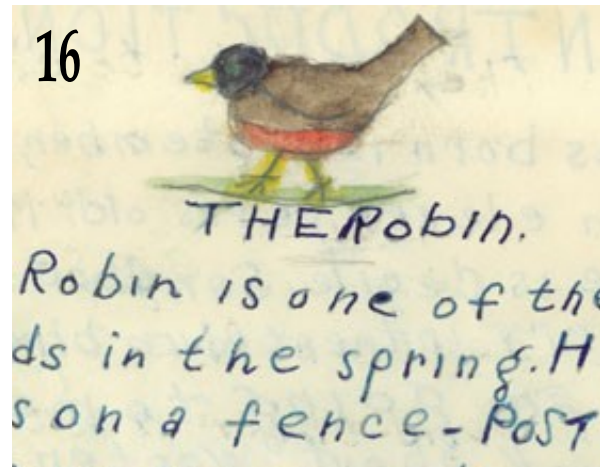
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Cover: Banding swans at Stinking Lake near Valhalla. The photograph shows Kells Sheehan and Mr. Hamm with a cygnet, surrounded by other spectators, July 1957 (SPRA 002.05.06.505)

Note on Photographs: Photographs featured in *Telling Our Stories* are unedited, apart from minimal cropping. In cases where substantial cropping may impact the context of the photograph, this will be noted in the caption.

A Publication of the South Peace Regional Archives

Our Vision: Preserving and Sharing the Past.
Our Mission: The purpose of South Peace Regional Archives is to gather, preserve, and share the historical records of municipalities, organizations, businesses, families, and individuals within the region, both now and in the future.

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Letter from the Editor

James MacGregor once compared the Peace River Country to a “great goose rising out of the far regions of Northern Alberta.” During these uncertain times, the familiar call of the Canadian Geese and Trumpeter Swans returning home after winter offer a sense of normalcy and comfort. This issue of *Telling Our Stories* celebrates our feathered friends: birds. We hope that its arrival brings comfort and perhaps a smile as it lands in your mailbox.

We pecked through the records for interesting fonds, photographs, and paper artifacts to bring you this special birds issue. We also called out to our followers who hatched several unique articles for your enjoyment. Now, more than ever, *Telling Our Stories* serves as an effective tool for making records accessible and raising awareness of the Archives. We know that many of you are roosting at home but offer a challenge. If you enjoy this magazine, sing to your neighbours, chatter to your relatives, and tweet on social media. Help *Telling Our Stories* take flight.

This magazine was made possible by the tireless efforts of our staff, but also our volunteers and guest contributors. For this issue, we are particularly indebted to those who contributed from a safe distance. We are also thankful to you, our readers, who continue your memberships and support!



Alyssa Currie
SPRA Executive Director

TAKE NOTE: SPRA and COVID-19

On March 16th, the South Peace Regional Archives closed to the public, amid rising cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) throughout Alberta and the rest of Canada. This closure resulted in an abrupt halt to all in-person donations, research requests, and volunteer work at the Archives as well as the cancellation of all public outreach events. The Board of Directors voted to postpone the AGM, originally scheduled for March 28th, until further notice.

The safety of our staff, volunteers, and members of the public remains the Archives' first priority. **The Archives will remain closed to the public until it is possible for us to reopen safely.** Updates on the Archives' services, including any plans for reopening, will be posted on our website and Facebook page.

For more information on the Archives' ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, see page 26.

Territory Acknowledgement

We acknowledge with respect that the South Peace Regional Archives is located on the ancestral and traditional lands of many Indigenous peoples. This territory is covered by Treaty 8, signed in 1899. The continuing relationship between Indigenous peoples and this land contributes to the rich knowledge and culture of the South Peace region.

We are grateful to serve the people on this land and honor the Calls for Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Welcome Kaydence SPRA's New Archives Assistant (Student)

Kaydence Redding is a first year Political Science student at the University of Alberta and the latest addition to the Archives team. Welcome, Kaydence!

Kaydence will be working with us this summer to gain practical experience in the Archives and learn more about the cultural heritage sector. She will be working on content for *Telling Our Stories*, projects related to the Indigenous History Committee, and launching a new #ThrowbackThursday social media campaign.

Kaydence has become passionate about the importance of sharing and preserving local history through her studies as a Political Science student, as a prolific local volunteer, and as a past president of Charles Spencer High School's social justice club, "The Maverick Movement". She is very excited to be working with the Archives this summer!



Above: Welcome, Kaydence!

The Archives Assistant position is made possible with funding support from Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations.

National Grant Supports Reconciliation Project

The South Peace Regional Archives is launching a new Reconciliation project, made possible by Library and Archives Canada's Documentary Heritage Communities Program (DHCP).

The project, called "Renaming the Past, Reclaiming Their Stories: Indigenous Records" will utilize records related to Indigenous peoples within the collections of the Archives. The project will examine records from 56 fonds previously identified by the Indigenous His-

tory Committee as containing Indigenous content, in order to provide culturally-appropriate descriptions and contextual information. It will increase access to approximately 300 Indigenous-related archival photographs and paper artifacts through digitization and promotion on social media. Through consultation with the Indigenous History Committee, the project will enable Indigenous peoples to engage in the identification of photographs and paper artifacts from the South Peace Regional Archives.

This project has been made possible in part by the Documentary Heritage Communities Program offered by Library and Archives Canada / Ce projet a été rendu possible en partie grâce au Programme pour les collectivités du patrimoine documentaire offert par Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

This Week in History

Looking Back at Kathryn Auger's Blog Series

Kathryn Auger began volunteering at the Archives in January 2011. Two years later, she began her popular "This Day in History" blog series, featuring articles published in Grande Prairie newspapers between 1913 and 1950. She educated and entertained her readership, while developing a tremendous following for the Archive's blog. Although Kathryn passed away on February 7, 2017, her blog posts remain some of the Archives most popular. We are delighted to share with you these three posts from the blog. Read on for stories about an unusual family pet, a little duck in need of a helping hand, and an illicit roast goose dinner.



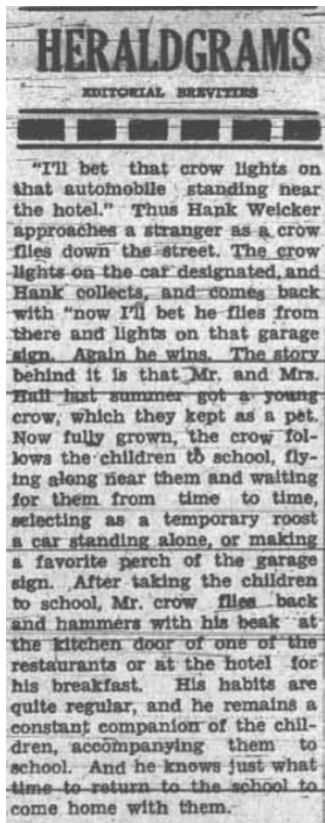
As the Crow Flies: February 4, 2016

I thought this was a cute story about a tame crow. What is funny is the fellow who made bets with strangers on where the crow would land. Apparently crows are very smart and social birds, and fairly easy to tame.

"I'll bet that crow lights on that automobile standing near the hotel." Thus Hank Weicker approaches a stranger as a crow flies down the street. The crow lights on the car designated, and Hank collects, and comes back with "now I'll bet he flies from there and lights on that garage sign. Again he wins. The story behind it is that Mr. and Mrs. Hall last summer got a young crow, which they kept as a pet. Now fully grown, the crow follows the children to school, flying along near them and waiting for them from time to time, selecting as a temporary roost a car standing alone, or making a favorite perch of the garage sign. After taking the children to school, Mr. Crow flies back and hammers with his beak at the kitchen door of one of the restaurants or at the hotel for his breakfast. His habits are quite regular, and he remains a constant companion of the children, accompanying them to school. And he knows just what time to return to the school to come home with them"

Top: Kathryn Auger at work in the archives, 2015.

Left: Grande Prairie Herald, February 1, 1935



A Stuck Duck: December 8, 2016

With the cold weather we've been having, we can sympathize with the little duck who got his tail frozen in the ice at Flying Shot Lake. Lucky for him some people were out skating and he was rescued. Interesting that the first place they took him was to the newspaper office.

Tail Frozen In Ice Duck Is Rescued; Wing Injured

A forlorn little duck, with its tail frozen fast in the ice on Flying Shot Lake, was rescued Wednesday afternoon by Jack Brown. The young man was skating with companions when he saw the bird sitting helplessly and quietly on the ice. Jack freed him and then discovered that the bird had an injured wing and so could not fly.

The duck was so cold it could not move at all at first, so Jack put it in his car under the heater and it soon began to show signs of life. When he brought it into the Tribune office, the duck was sitting quietly in his hand, apparently enjoying the stroking and the warmth. So far it has shown no interest in the food offered, but if he can make it eat, Jack hopes he will be able to take the bird with him when the family go to Vancouver next week.

The duck was identified by Dr. L.J. O'Brien & Dr. G.D. O'Brien as an immature Ruddy Duck.



Top: The Herald-Tribune, December 8, 1949

Left: Walter Medlock, local barber, with his tame crow. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Auger, Walter's granddaughter.

Right: Wild ducks on DeBolt Creek at the E. Mehlum farm, ca. 1930 (SPRA 116.09.01.01.0513)



Continued from page 7

But I'm Just the Cook: October 11, 2016

This story reminds me of the scene in the movie *A Christmas Story*, when the Bumpus's dogs have stolen the turkey but the aroma lingers in the air. What happened seems a bit unfair, but I don't know what the regulations were in those days. It's curious that it was the cook who was charged, but I think the mistake was having the dinner in a restaurant. It also seems like a bit of a set-up that the police just happened along as the bird was about to be served.

Police Confiscate Wild Goose as it Was to be Served

To have one's appetite all whetted up in anticipation for something for which one has a longing desire, and all at once to find that something has suddenly disappeared, would be considered the toughest kind of luck by the average healthy citizen.

Well that is just what happened to a party of young

men at Grande Prairie the other night.

Here is the story:

Jack Marvin, popular proprietor of the Palace Café, had been requested by a local boy who was putting on a little dinner party to cook a wild goose he had shot a few days before.

The goose was being cooked to a turn and was about to be served when policemen swooped down and confiscated the bird.

On Tuesday Jack Marvin appeared before Magistrate Galway and was fined \$10 and costs for serving guests wild game without a permit. Jack has wired to the game commissioner for the necessary permit and is awaiting a reply.

The other game birds found on the premises were ordered to be returned to parties who presented the birds to the café.

The incident goes to show that sometimes there is a slip between goose and the lip.

Flying Shot Lake

What's in the name?

May was *Sakipakawipisim* (the Leaf Budding Moon). In the third week of May, when the leaves would start budding on the trees, the bird *Washepiscan* would sing a song to announce that the baby moose were being born.

June was referred to as *Paskawihowipisim* (the Egg Laying Moon). In June, families would start to harvest the eggs of the ducks and geese that inhabited the lake. Feasts would be held around Flying Shot Lake. It was a time for the people and their relatives to gather and share what the Lake and land provided. As a descendant of these people, I give thanks, *Nanaskamon*, for the birds for providing sustenance for my people and the knowledge that I am able to share what I have been taught of Flying Shot Lake and the birds who still remain.

The following story was submitted by guest contributor Shelley Calliou. Shelley is a member of the *As'in'i'wa'chi Ni'yaw Nation*, also known as the *Kelly Lake Cree Nation*. She is also an active member of the *Archives' Indigenous History Committee*.

In the late 1800s, Flying Shot Lake was inhabited by Cree speaking people. The lake was also home to many migratory birds. There are months in the Cree calendar that pertain to the migratory birds of spring. The Cree name for Flying Shot Lake was *Nawatiw Sagaygan* and referred to them shooting ducks and geese over the Lake. March was referred to as *Niskipisim* (the Goose Moon). The birds coming in the spring provided them with a change in their diet.

April was called *Ayikipisim* (the Frog Moon). By April, the sound of the geese and ducks would indicate the arrival of spring. Ice would have melted off the Lake and the sounds of the geese and ducks would have been a welcoming sound after a hard winter.

Left: *The Northern Tribune*, October 10, 1935

Below: A display of the catch from a Carveth family goose hunting trip, ca. 1920 (SPRA 1986.60.2a)

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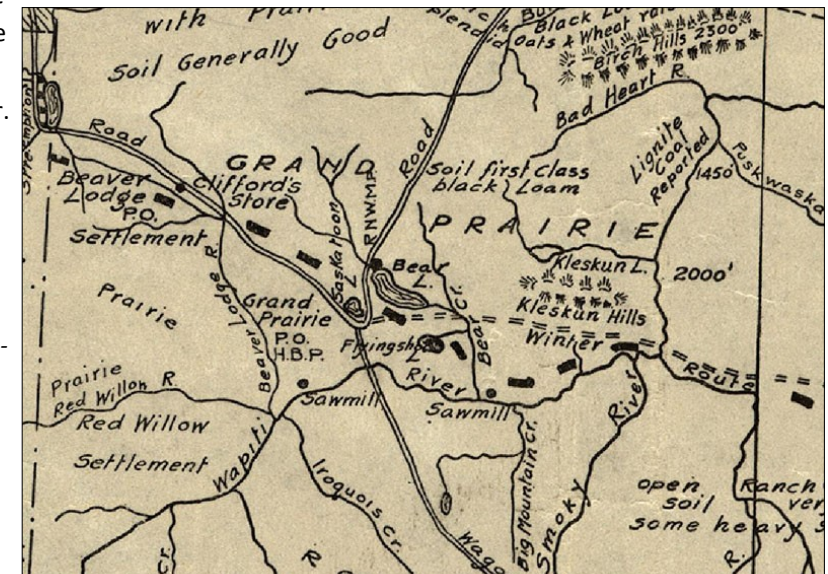
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Right: Portion of "Peace River Country showing Trails and Settlements, 1913." This map was commissioned by the Canadian Northern Railway in 1913 to illustrate existing and planned rail lines, as well as other relevant information. This portion of the map shows "Flyingshot L." and the surrounding "Grand Prairie." (SPRA 1999.08.01)



Welcome to Swan City

The Trumpeter Swan serves as an official symbol of the City of Grande Prairie, also known as "Swan City." Enjoy these swan-related photos from the South Peace Regional Archives.



Top left: Domesticated Trumpeter Swans on the backdoor step of Joe Tomshak farm near Grande Prairie. This is the second winter these rare, beautiful birds have spent on the farm where they were brought as small cygnets in June, 1947. Photo by Gertrude Charters, 1948 (SPRA 112.02.20)



Top right: "Grande Prairie Welcomes You" sign, 1983 (SPRA 002.05.03.166)

Left: Trumpeter Swan in molt on Clairmont Lake, June 1970 (SPRA 002.05.06.515)

Bottom left: One adult Trumpeter Swan and three cygnets swim on Intermittent Lake on John Vavrek's farm, September 15, 1982 (SPRA 002.05.06.518)

Bottom right: Betty (Euphemia) McNaught watches young swans (cygnets) on the lawn of the McNaught farm near Beaverlodge, 1958 (SPRA 002.05.06.498)



Top left: "Foster mother" feeding three Trumpeter Swans which were raised on the Tomshak farm north of Clairmont, 1953 (SPRA 177.90)

Top right: "The Spirit of Grande Prairie," owned by the Trumpeter Swan Balloon Club and later by the Grande Prairie Hot Air Balloon Events Assoc., flew in many Provincial and National Hot Air Balloon Championships, 1989 (SPRA 263.02.01)

Right: County Fair Parade floats including Grande Prairie's "Home of the Trumpeter Swan" float, 1964 (SPRA 190.02.01.0488.03)

Bottom left: A Trumpeter Swan in a pond, ca. 1950 (SPRA 032.08.08.0896)

Bottom right: Joe Tomshak feeds a flock of chickens and two tame swans on his farm at Clairmont, 1948 (SPRA 002.05.06.501)



Speedy Bird Gets the Worm

Pigeon Racing in the South Peace

This article was contributed by Kaydence Redding. This summer, Kaydence is working as the Archives Assistant (Student) at the South Peace Regional Archives.

There is no lack of exciting stories and extraordinary pieces of history to be found at the South Peace Regional Archives. Nestled among the Sports, Recreation, and Leisure reference files are news clippings detailing the unique story of a group of 10 local pigeon enthusiasts who joined forces in 1987 to create a club fit for sports fans and bird lovers alike: the Grande Prairie Pigeon Racing Club. Pigeon racing is a sport in which trained racing pigeons are released by their owners at a spe-



Pigeon racing club started

By Stephen Cragg
Pigeon racing is a "poor man's horse race," says Bob Lange.
Lange and a group of 10 or 12 pigeon fanciers have joined forces to create the Grande Prairie and area Pigeon Racing Club.
A veteran pigeon racer, Lange was first introduced to the world of pigeon racing at the tender age of five, when he was living in Europe. He has raced with the Dawson Creek club, which has been established for approximately 12 years. Now, Lange owns over 500 pigeons.
"I have birds from every place in the world," he says.
Club member Mike Tomshak explains the attraction to the unique sport.
"It has to be in you. You have to like birds," says the Grande Prairie-area farmer. A large shed on his farm has been renovated by Tomshak to accommodate 150 birds. The colorful assortment of birds vary in size and strain and the shed is spacious and kept clean.
"If the pigeons are not overdone, they will not fly from their loft," explains



The newly-founded Grande Prairie Pigeon Racing club already has 10 members. Some of the members are: (left to right) George Rolley, Mike Wright, Bob Lange, Mike Tomshak and Seth Barnfield.
Races are scheduled to run May through August. Distances covered will range from 100 to 600 miles.
The birds are clocked using a clocking machine which measures, with a band around the bird's leg, the time and distance. Races are sponsored by Bowings Airline.
Although relatively new in Canada, pigeon racing is big business there, like horse racing. Winning birds can go for \$15,000.
On the average, a pair of pigeons can be purchased for \$25 in Canada.
The club is governed under the Canadian Pigeon Union, located in Toronto, Ontario. The club will meet the last Wednesday of every month.
For more information, contact Bob Lange at 567-2123, or Mike Tomshak at 567-3822.

Above: Daily Herald-Tribune, April 15, 1987, featuring Photo of Club Founders (From SPRA 510.26.062, Pigeon Racing Reference File)

cific location, often ranging from 150 to 950 kilometers away. The pigeons are then monitored using a clocking machine that is placed on their legs and measures the distance travelled per second as they make the return flight home. The bird that arrives home the fastest is declared the winner of that day's race, and often earns a sum of prize money for their owners. The Grande Prairie Pigeon Racing Club's 1987 season ran from May to late August, with races taking place every weekend.

Bob Lange, a Clairmont resident and one of the Grande Prairie Pigeon Racing Club's founders, had a passion for pigeon racing long before the club was

Left: Some of Bob Lange's Racing Pigeons, Daily Herald-Tribune, May 3, 1984 (From SPRA 510.26.062, Pigeon Racing Reference File)

established. In the 3 May 1984 edition of the Daily Herald-Tribune, Lange described his 50-year-long history of training and breeding pigeons for racing. According to the article, Lange owned about 500 pigeons from locations such as France, Belgium, England, Ireland, and the United States: some of which had cost him as much as \$1,200. Lange detailed the long process of training a racing pigeon, which he recommends begins when the pigeon is about three months old. The initial training starts by taking the pigeon about 1.5 to 8 kilometers away, and having it return home from each direction. The distance is gradually increased until eventually the pigeon can complete a 480 kilometer trip. At the time the article was published, Lange was breeding pigeons using "proven birds who have flown at least 1,600 kilometers" for other clubs and individuals, however he expressed his hopes for setting up a racing club in the Grande Prairie area (DHT, 3 May 1984). Lange later accomplished this dream with the establishment of the Grande Prairie Pigeon Racing Club.

Members of the Grande Prairie Pigeon Racing Club saw their fair share of races gone wrong. Herald-Tribune staff member Stephen Fletcher once observed that "when your racetrack is in the sky, there's no telling what an ill-timed air current can do," leaving lots of unpredictable variables in each race (DHT, c 1990). Between the pigeons losing their sense of direction, taking a break in comfy-looking barns along the route, or the ever constant threat of prey-seeking marauders, there are plenty of opportunities for racing events to go awry. Mike Wright, a founder and former president of the club, knew this all too well. Wright shared various stories of mishaps in his pigeon racing career with the Daily Herald-Tribune. One of

these involved a hawk with a very expensive palate. Just weeks after purchasing a very speedy, champion racer for \$10,000, Wright learned the hard way that high prices don't guarantee results. His new prized-pigeon became a lunchtime meal for one of the Peace Region's many birds of prey. The truly unpredictable nature of pigeon racing means that even with proven winners and well trained racers, there are rarely any certainties when it comes to the sport.

These clippings show years of passion and dedication towards breeding, training, and racing pigeons. Through these records, it is apparent that the Grande Prairie Pigeon Racing Club gave community members in Grande Prairie and the surrounding areas a unique opportunity: to learn and appreciate the many challenges and triumphs that come along with the excitement of pigeon racing.

Below: Daily Herald-Tribune, ca. 1990 (From SPRA 510.26.062, Pigeon Racing Reference File)

Keep your eye on the birdie!

Top gun racing pigeons sometimes forget to come home

By STEPHEN FLETCHER
Herald-Tribune staff

Mike Wright is a patient man. He knows pigeons aren't into sprinting to the finish line. The birds like to take their time. They hardly ever break a sweat. Often they're sidetracked on route by a cow-looking barn or a marauding hawk in search of a tasty squab entrée.

And occasionally they never make it back home, which can really spoil a race.

"Sometimes they're gone for good," admits Wright. "Sometimes they show up three weeks or a month later."

When your racetrack is the skies, there's no telling what an ill-timed air current can do to your schedule. This probably explains what happened to a flock of Wright's birds out on a training run earlier in the day.

"I took about 38 to the top of Richmond Hill (west of the city) this morning and I'm still waiting for half of them to come home," Wright smiled. "They're young ones yet."

Wright is past-president of the Grande Prairie Pigeon Racing Association, a little-known club that is trying to instill some European-style enthusiasm for the sport in the Peace Country.

He shares his Crowdale acreage with his family, a few dogs and about 140 homing pigeons, which roost in three wooden lofts in the backyard.

The satisfaction of winning is what has kept Wright and the club's other members enthralled. And training and good breeding is what can make a champion out of a normally docile fine-feathered friend.

The rules of the race are simple. On just about every weekend between May and September, club members track their pedigreed pigeons to some location a few hundred kilometres away. They attach countermarks to the legs of the birds and then let them fly.

They then drive back home and wait. The fastest bird home makes it to the top of the pecking order on that day's racing card.

Just how these birds develop their impeccable navigational systems is a mystery that has led to a multitude of theories. It's a known fact, however, that some pigeons are better navigators than others.

Wright, who has been keeping birds since he was 10, recently shelled out \$1,000 for a speedy pigeon. Like the rest of the sporting world, he soon realized that high-priced athletes never come with guarantees of success.

The expensive racer was gobbled up three weeks ago by a hawk with a first-class palate.

That's not such a high price to pay when a major derby trophy earns the winner \$100,000.

In Alberta, the sport is on a less grander scale. Local pigeon racers pay anywhere between \$1 and \$15,000 for their birds.

Wright, who has been keeping birds since he was 10, recently shelled out \$1,000 for a speedy pigeon. Like the rest of the sporting world, he soon realized that high-priced athletes never come with guarantees of success.

The expensive racer was gobbled up three weeks ago by a hawk with a first-class palate.

Then again, Wright knows there are no certainties in a sport whose participants, despite their uncanny ability to travel long distances, have had to cope with a lot of drivel about the size of their brains.

The birds' detractors should realize that a good racing pigeon can fly 400 kilometres in six hours. Albeit, the sport is also full of days when the top guns in the game have difficulty finding their mark.

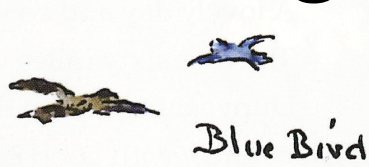
"I can sit outside expecting the birds to come home in two hours and they'll finally arrive a week later," says an ever-patient Wright.

Staff Photo by Christine Vacantia

Olwen's Own Words: Bird Watching



The Wood pecker



Blue Bird

In 1933, Olwen Sanger-Davies travelled from East Sussex, England to the Peace Country to visit her younger brother, Morgan. Olwen documented her visit in two personal scrapbooks, containing approximately 500 drawings and paintings. "Olwen's Own Words" features excerpts and illustrations from these scrapbooks.

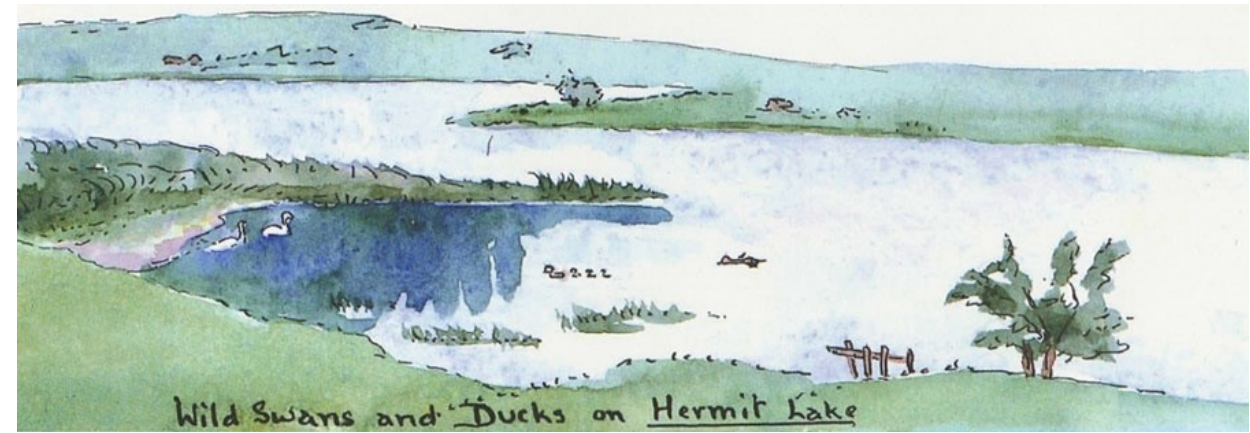
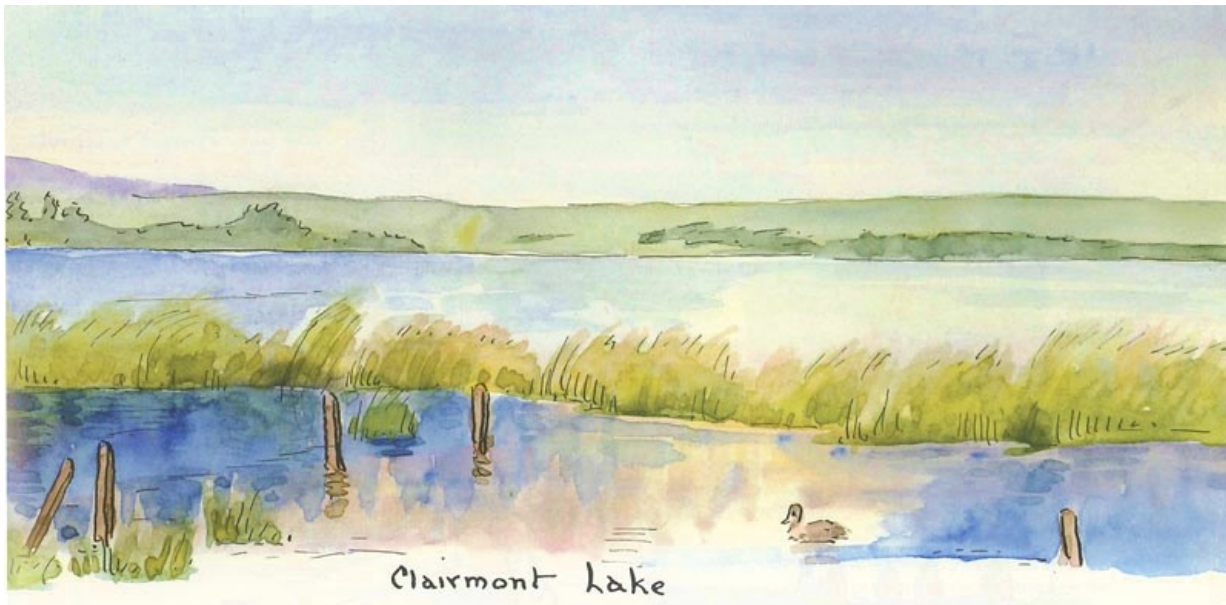
Sunday, June 25th

Church at 8:00, 11:00, and 8:00 with fair congregations; we saw the children assembling for Sunday school at 12:15.

It came on to rain, so after a short walk in the afternoon, when we saw a woodpecker, we stayed in and finished off sketches.

Friday, August 18th

We heard and saw the first flock of wild geese; they lighted on some of our ploughed land.



September

All through September people came out from town goose-shooting; we often saw a car on the top of the hill waiting.

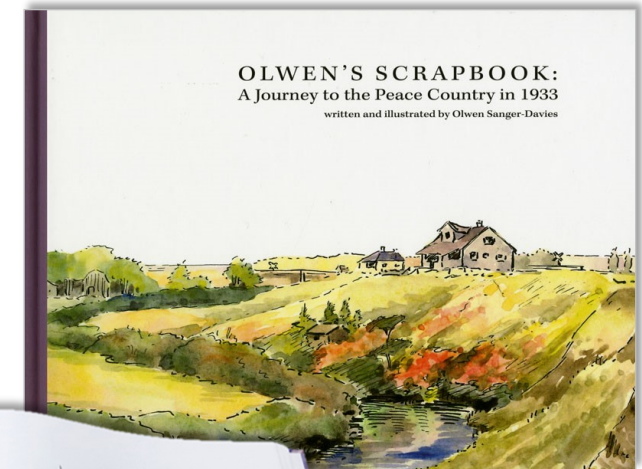
Olwen's Scrapbook: A Journey to the Peace Country in 1933 can be purchased from the Archives for \$40⁰⁰ + \$2⁰⁰ GST. Cash and cheques are accepted.



Whisky Jack

Purchase your
copy of Olwen's
Scrapbook today

ONLY \$40.00 + GST
while quantities last



Limited copies!
Cash and cheques
are accepted.

Cecile's Western Birds

One of the great pleasures of a woodland walk, particularly in the spring, is keeping watch for the many species of birds that inhabit our region. In 1931, eleven-year-old Cecile Sandboe's fascination with birds inspired her to create a book featuring descriptions and watercolour paintings of twenty-four different species; she was a student at Buffalo Lake School at the time. This booklet was contributed by Cecile's grandson, Coyne Angen. Enjoy these excerpts!

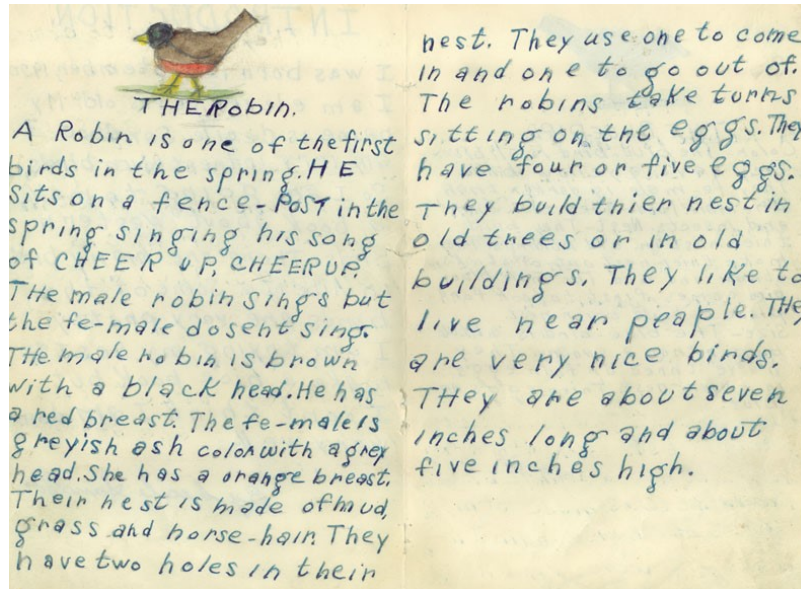
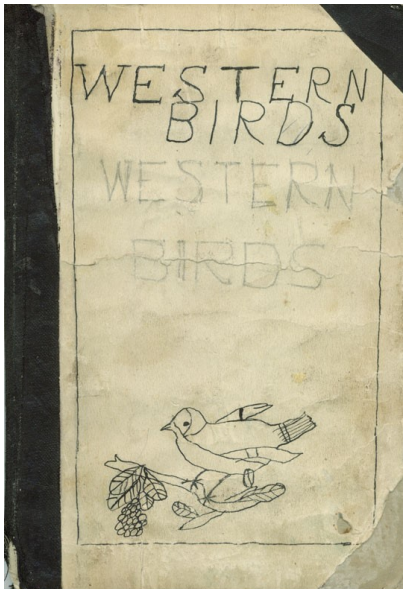
"INTRODUCTION

I was born in September, 1920. I am eleven years old. My name is Cecile Sandboe. I am very interested in birds, so I am going to make a book about Western Birds. There are many birds in Alberta. Some of the birds are very pretty. I am trying my best to make a nice book but I don't think I am doing very well."

"The Robin

A robin is one of the first birds in the spring. He sits on a fence-post in the spring singing his song of CHEER UP, CHEER UP. The male robin sings but the female doesn't [sic] sing. The male robin is brown with a black head. He has a red breast. The female is greyish ash color with a grey head. She has an orange breast. Their nest is made of mud, grass, and horse-hair. They have two holes in their nest. They use one to come in and one to go out of. The robins take turns sitting on the eggs. They have four or five eggs. They build their nest in old trees or in old buildings. They like to live near people. They are very nice birds. They are about seven inches long and about five inches high."

Below: The title page and a description of the robin from Cecile's "Western Birds" book.



"The Woodpecker

Color - The woodpecker is spotted with black. He has a red spot at the top of his head. Food - They eat worms. Nest - They make a hole in a tree and puts saw-dust inside it. Size - They are a little bigger than the robin. You can hear them pecking at some tree or something. When they are pecking, it sounds just like a hammer. They have four or five eggs. The eggs are white with brown spots on them. They are very nice birds. The woodpecker does not sing."

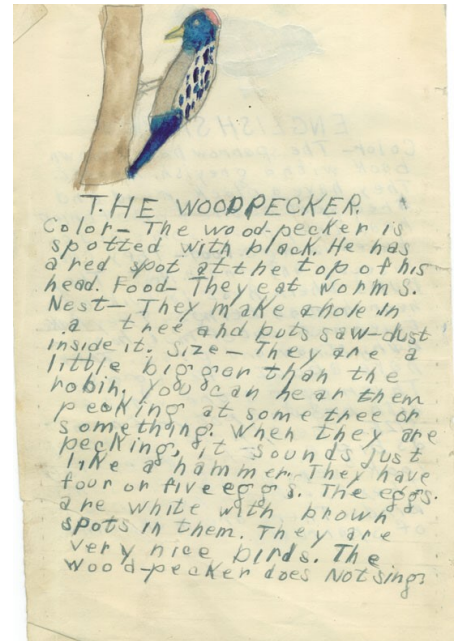
Cecile's daughter, Gail Risvold, shared her perspective with us. "It is appropriate to write about my mom in this edition of your magazine because she was always interested in birds. She put bird feeders out and she took great pleasure in observing which birds would come to visit. One time when she was visiting us in Hinton my husband Ross and Mom sat on our patio and watched the different birds that came for a drink in our backyard pond. I decided it was time to clean the pond and put in fresh water but I also added an ingredient that got rid of algae. The instructions stated that it was safe to use and it would not cause harm to any animals including birds. BUT the birds did not agree! They did not come back for a drink and I felt bad because I deprived Mom of the pleasure they had experienced. They quickly



drained the water without me knowing and the birds returned."

Cecile's descendants also shared a letter written to Cecile and her siblings by their former teacher, Miss Della Finlay, in 1935. Miss Finlay was the teacher at Buffalo Lake School in 1931 when Cecile created her "Western Birds" book; she later moved to Mannville, Alberta. She writes about the birds in her own backyard, perhaps remembering the book Cecile had compiled several years earlier.

"We have a large flock of chick-a-dees and one of grosbeaks (you know the big yellow winter bird) in the bluff behind the house. We hung a large piece of beef in the trees for them but I am afraid the magpies will find it. Perhaps you saw them when you lived on the prairie. They are rather pretty birds, white and black, with long tails but sure chase the little birds. I have tried to shoot some of them but can't manage to hit them."



Above: Cecile's description of the woodpecker

Left: Carl & Clara (Torgerson) Sandboe with daughter Cecile, 1922 (contributed by Coyne Angen)

Cereal Box Canaries

Unravelling an Archival Mystery

We don't often receive artwork in the Archives. However, one 2018 donation provides an exceptional example of the creative life of people who lived in the South Peace. What began as an archival mystery has turned into a wonderful addition to our local history!

In late 2018, Archives volunteer Betty Dyck stumbled across a collection of amateur artwork while working at a local thrift store. Among the artwork were several paintings of birds, completed on the backs of cereal boxes. Betty felt the collection might be historically significant and brought it to the Archives for the staff to examine. Intrigued, we tried to learn more about the artist, Doris Rausch-Wagar, but found very little online. We featured this donation in the September 2018 issue of *Telling Our Stories*, asking for information about Doris. Amazingly, her family responded!

Doris lives with dementia and has little memory of her family and life. Her children, cleaning her house after she moved into assisted living, stumbled across her artwork. Not sure what to do with it, they donated it along with other belongings to a local thrift store. They were delighted to discover where their mother's artwork found a home. A visit with Doris' son Stephen helped us better understand the context of these artworks and their place in the history of the South Peace region.



Doris Rausch was born 16 September 1929 on a farm near Halkirk, Alberta. Her father [Albert] Harold Rausch worked as a rancher while her mother [Elizabeth] Nellie raised their family. Doris lived on the family farm, dabbling in ranching, until her late twenties. She loved to paint and, in 1954, attended classes at the Banff School of Fine Arts (now called the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity).

Several years later, Doris met her future husband, William Maxwell Wagar, at a local movie theatre.

Left: A painting signed "D. Rausch, 1954" possibly created while Doris was attending the Banff School of Fine Arts (From SPRA 2018.050)



Above: A drawing of a Blue Heron, from an art book that Doris created as a school assignment when she was twelve, 1941. (From SPRA 2018.050)



Left: A painting of a bird likely completed by Doris' son Kurt, c. 1970s (From SPRA 2018.050)

Right: Doris and her children painted on the backs of cereal boxes like this one, c. 1970s. (From SPRA 2018.050)



Doris and William had two children together: Stephen and Kurt. In 1966, the family moved to Grande Prairie when William began working at Canadian Utilities. Doris volunteered as a teacher's aid at St. Gerald Elementary and was an active member of the Ladies Auxiliary.

In her spare time, Doris enjoyed gardening, birdwatching, and berry-picking with her children. She also loved music and studied piano for pleasure. She sold trees and shrubs out of her garage to fund these hobbies. While Doris continued to enjoy drawing and painting, she found it difficult to make time for these activities. She taught her children to paint on the backs of cereal boxes when they were young and saved much of the artwork they produced. The unique designs on these cereal boxes help determine the approximate dates of the paintings. Many years later, in the 1990s, Doris began taking art classes and pursuing her creative interests once again.

Accession 2018.050 contains artwork produced by Doris Rausch-Wagar and her children, spanning from the early 1940s to early 2000s. It includes paintings, drawings, illustrated cards, and an art book that Doris created as a school assignment when she was twelve. Once processed, the collection will be a valuable resource for future historians (for research) and for artists (to inform their own creative work). We are so



Above: An illustrated card created by Doris in 1999. It is signed "D. Rausch-Wagar." (From SPRA 2018.050)

grateful to Doris, her family, and our intrepid volunteer for making sure these unique records found a permanent home in the Archives.

Bird's Eye View

Aerial Photographs

Have you ever imagined what it's like to be a bird flying in the sky? Aerial photographs provide a chance to experience the world around us from the perspective of a bird: a unique viewpoint we don't often get to experience. When these photographs were taken, most people living in the South Peace did not have

many opportunities to experience flying in a plane. As a result, many considered the views offered by aerial photographs a thrilling novelty. The excitement of seeing a common landmark from a completely new view is still felt today. Can you identify these South Peace communities using the eyes of a bird?



Can you match the photographs?

- | | | |
|----------|---|--------------------|
| A | ① | Beaverlodge, 1960 |
| B | ② | Wanham, 1971 |
| C | ③ | Valhalla, 1920 |
| D | ④ | Hythe, 1929 |
| E | ⑤ | Grande Cache, 1975 |
| F | ⑥ | Sexsmith, 1929 |

Solutions on page 26

Archiveology: Birds of a Feather

This article was contributed by Josephine Sallis. Josephine worked as the Archivist of the South Peace Regional Archives for three years. During her time at the Archives, she contributed countless hours to supporting our mission. Josephine has recently moved to Winnipeg to be closer to her family. The Archives staff and volunteers will miss her dearly!

Birds and archives have more in common than immediately meets the eye. It is hard to imagine that the majestic Trumpeter Swan, the annoying Magpie, or the delicate Ruby-Throated Hummingbird are related to feathered, therapod dinosaurs and that their closest living relatives are crocodiles. This makes birds living history. Their lives and habits and their very bodies provide a link to a past that we can often only barely imagine. The same could be said for Archives.

Within the walls of any Archives are records that link us to our past selves. Documents and photographs, created in another time, live on, often with a new purpose not imagined by their original creator. When we see the images, trace the lines of ink, or hold an



Above: Wild duck half-grown strayed into boarding house. Photographed by G.S. Moyer, 1922 (SPRA 362.02.09.08)

artefact that predates written history, we connect to that item's time of creation and its original creator.

Both birds and Archives exist in great diversity. There are more than 40 orders and 10,000 different species of birds world wide. Birds come in all sizes, from the tiny 5 cm bee hummingbird to the mighty 2.75 m ostrich. There are the sleek egrets and cranes and the rotund grouse and partridges. Some are dull of colour, like the crow or owl, while others are boldly colourful, like the peacock or pheasant.

Similarly, there are a wide variety of Archives that researchers can access around the world. Government archives exist at a variety of levels and largely

Left: A brightly-coloured Golden Red Pheasant, part of Vince Durda's collection of exotic birds, 1979 (SPRA 002.05.06.523)



collect records created by that level of government. Community Archives can support a geographic community or a social community. The South Peace Regional Archives supports a geographic community, while the ArQuives supports LGBTQ people across Canada. Universities establish Archives to manage their institutional records, as well as records related to their particular regional or teaching mandate. People, families, and corporate entities often maintain their own archives, whether it is a room in a building or a box safely stored in their closet.

Birds have proven to be extremely adaptable over millennia. First, they adapted from being dinosaurs. As birds, they thrive in multiple types of environments and based on the local offerings, species have adapted to swim for fish, sky-hunt small mammals, peck at trees for grub, or sip nectar.

Archives have proven their adaptability over the years, modifying processes and purposes to suit the needs of their surrounding users and to survive frequent changes to their environment. Early archives were largely composed of government records and not available to the public. Access to Archives gradually came to be seen as a right of citizens. Over suc-

Below: A Saw Whet Owl in the Sheehans' granary clutching a bird in its talons, 1977 (SPRA 002.05.06.521, cropped)



Above: Pigeons of several varieties in a pen, part of Vince Durda's collection of exotic birds, 1979 (SPRA 002.05.06.524)

ceeding generations, Archives moved beyond collection of government and other institutional records to collection and preservation of private records.

Besides a shift in the content and context of records collecting, Archives have also adapted by broadening their view of what an archival record should look like. As photography, film, and digital records began to gain prominence in the daily world, Archives changed collecting policies to respect and collect these kinds of "documents". With increasing understanding of the colonial nature of record-collecting, Archives are starting to show an openness to collecting and preserving oral histories and providing support to in-house archival preservation.

The trait of adaptability has allowed both birds and Archives to survive to the present day. Adaptability helps both to maintain a sometimes tenuous but still unbroken link to the past. Adaptability will give both the ability to continue into the future.

SPRA has recently hired a new Archivist, who will be joining our team in the middle of June. Stay tuned for more details.

Fonds 106 Trumpeter Swan Naturalists Society

The Trumpeter Swan Naturalists Society (originally the Northern Alberta Nature Club and, later, The Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society) was organized in April 1976 by rural residents around Wembley. The purpose of the society was to document the natural history of the Grande Prairie region, identify areas accessible for birdwatching and nature appreciation, and promote conservation and preservation.

The 9 cm of textual records contained within fonds 106 include published articles by F. M. Helleiner (later co-editor of the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario*) from 1953-1954; copies of the club newsletter, *The Northern Naturalist*, and field records which include cards and reports. The entries in the reports provide a wealth of information about the local wildlife and the environment in this region during the 1970s. Thanks to the work of Mathew Wozniak, a regular Archives supporter and volunteer, the reports for the club were transcribed in 2018.

On 19 December 1976, counts were taken at Dimsdale Village, Huallen, Saskatoon Hill, Saskatoon Lake, Township 70 (various ranges), and Wembley. According to the reports, “twenty different species were observed with a total of 661 individuals.” Besides noting birds by species and number (5 Sharp-tailed Grouse, 1 Short-eared Owl, and 6 Black-billed Magpie in Huallen), the reports also include the time and environment: “The count conducted between 1030-1200 hrs. Temperature: -3F. Overcast sky, no wind, snow cover 2 – 2 ½ inches.”

Most entries are bare observations, but several include short asides that reveal excitement — or lack thereof — on the part of the watchers. One May 1977 report notes that “Woking really produced a surprise sighting of 1 female RING-NECKED PHEASANT just west of there by the Craigs on April 24.” Another October 1977 entry seems a little less enthused: “Don’t know why Edmonton got so excited over last year’s sighting of Swainson’s hawks. Oldtimers will tell you they aren’t unusual here.”

As any regular reader of *Telling Our Stories* will know, records often take on a life of their own beyond their original purpose. These records offer a glimpse into the habits and personalities of the birdwatchers as well. Yvonne MacAlister, a driving force behind the original club, often related her activities in between her bird-watching in her reports. In her entry for Mary 1979, she notes her day does not start well. She went into Wembley for a tractor tire, visited friends where they saw “a very twitterpated Evening Grosbeak”, then headed home where she abandoned lunch dishes to attempt a photograph of a Ruby Throated Hummingbird. That didn’t work out “But... maybe tomorrow.” Yvonne ends her report on a high note, reminding us to think ahead to the future.

The Trumpeter Swan Naturalists Society folded in 1981 and was replaced by the Peace Parkland Naturalists in 1989. Their records provide a glimpse into the past of the local environment and its feathered and human inhabitants. With a little help from the Archives, they will live far into the future.

In Memory: Mary Nutting

The South Peace Regional Archives is deeply saddened to announce the passing of our founding Executive Director and dear friend, Mary Nutting. Mary passed away on Monday, April 20, 2020 after a two year battle with breast cancer.

Mary discovered her passion for history after spending a year in England and subsequently discovering the rich history of our local region. After several years of volunteering at the Grande Prairie Museum, Mary completed an initial survey to identify the locations of archival records of the South Peace. In 2000, she was hired to lead the newly established South Peace Regional Archives, where she worked for the next seventeen years. After she retired, Mary continued volunteering in the local heritage sector.

One of Mary’s great passions was connecting people to their history. She enjoyed exploring the family collections and helping people in their “treasure hunts” through the Archives. Mary once shared this particularly memorable encounter:

“Not long after the Archives opened in 2000, I received a request to view a particular diary. The visitor was the grand-daughter of the author and had never seen the diary in question. She smiled at me as I handed her the file, but then an amazing thing happened. As her hand touched the cover of the diary, the tears began to stream down her face. She was not just reading about an historical event, but touching her grandmother in this document that had been so personal to her at a memorable and difficult time. It surprised us both, I think.”



Photograph courtesy of Fran Rodgers Photography

Among Mary’s proudest achievements was authoring and contributing to numerous historical publications, including *Olwen’s Scrapbook: A Journey to the Peace Country in 1933* and *A Grande Education: 100 Schools in the County of Grande Prairie, 1910-1960*. Her contributions to preserving local history were recognized by numerous awards through the years. Regarding her work in the Archives, Mary once said:

“The South Peace Regional Archives are all about time. The time that has passed, the time that keeps on passing, but also the time that is given to all of us to create a future for that past time.”

Mary’s time with the Archives created a legacy that will endure for generations. Her tireless work to preserve our region’s history profoundly impacted our organization and so many others. She will be deeply missed by all who knew her and her influence will be felt by countless others.

New at the Archives SPRA and COVID-19

Continued from page 4.

While the South Peace Regional Archives remain closed to the public, our staff have been hard at work completing vital behind-the-scenes tasks to support our mission of gathering, preserving, and sharing the historical records of our region. The Archives has implemented strict risk management measures to ensure everyone's safety as we continue to operate.

Archives provide vital information to inform others (policy-makers, media, etc.) on past responses to emergencies, pandemics, epidemics, and economic busts. Here at the South Peace Regional Archives, we also provide 24/7 access to local history through our website, social media, and email support. Archives staff are available during regular business hours to provide remote research assistance via phone. Volunteers from our Awareness committee, Indigenous History committee, and Future Planning committee are conducting remote research to support outreach, Reconciliation, and the growth of the Archives. Many other volunteers are working from home to enhance our reference files, transcription projects, and research guides. Although we may be closed to the public, we are as busy (or busier!) than ever before. Thank you for your ongoing support!

Did you know?

The Government of Alberta declared "operations to preserve history and cultural heritage" essential services. Yes, that includes archives!

We would like to gratefully acknowledge Martha and Leo Dawson

for their donation through **CanadaHelps.org**

Their generous donation to the Archive's building fund was made in memory of Mary Nutting, founder of the South Peace Regional Archives. With help from our regional partners, businesses, and individual contributions, we hope to establish a secure and purpose-centered archival facility. Thank you for helping us reach that goal.

"The South Peace Regional Archives are all about time. The time that has passed, the time that keeps on passing, but also the time that is given to all of us to create a future for that past time." -Mary Nutting

Solutions to "Bird's Eye View" (pages 20-21)

A, 6: Bird's eye view of Sexsmith from the north, taken in 1929 from the top of one of the elevators. (SPRA 610.01.11, cropped)

B, 4: Bird's eye view of Hythe seen from the southwest in 1929. The Donald Hotel is on the far right. (SPRA 610.01.20, cropped)

C, 2: Aerial view of Wanham. Photograph taken during the Plowing Match in Wanham, ca. 1971 (SPRA 018.03.66c)

D, 1: An aerial view of the town of Beaverlodge, including six grain elevators, the school, and many businesses and homes, ca. 1960 (SPRA 032.08.08.0033)

E, 3: An aerial of the old community of Valhalla, with Molde School in the foreground, ca. 1920. (SPRA 2008.90.24, cropped)

F, 5: Aerial photograph of the town of Grande Cache and a view of the Coal Mine north of the town, 1975 (SPRA 050.08.03.121a)

South Peace Regional Archives Society Membership Application/Renewal Form

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

I would like more information about becoming a: _____ volunteer _____ board member

Select your membership:

Yearly membership: receive communications to stay informed about issues and happenings at the Archives, get involved in the society, attend meetings, vote on issues, and run for office.

Lifetime membership: receive all of the benefits of a regular membership, without the hassle of yearly renewal, and know that your membership could have a greater immediate impact.

This membership is _____ new _____ renewal

Yearly Membership
\$20.00/person or \$30.00/couple _____

Lifetime Membership
\$500.00/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: 780-831-7371
Director@southpeacearchives.org

Eco-option: I would like to receive a digital subscription to *Telling Our Stories*; I will receive an email link to a full-color copy of each issue. By selecting a digital subscription, I understand that I am opting out of receiving paper issues of *Telling Our Stories*.

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