

TELLING OUR STORIES

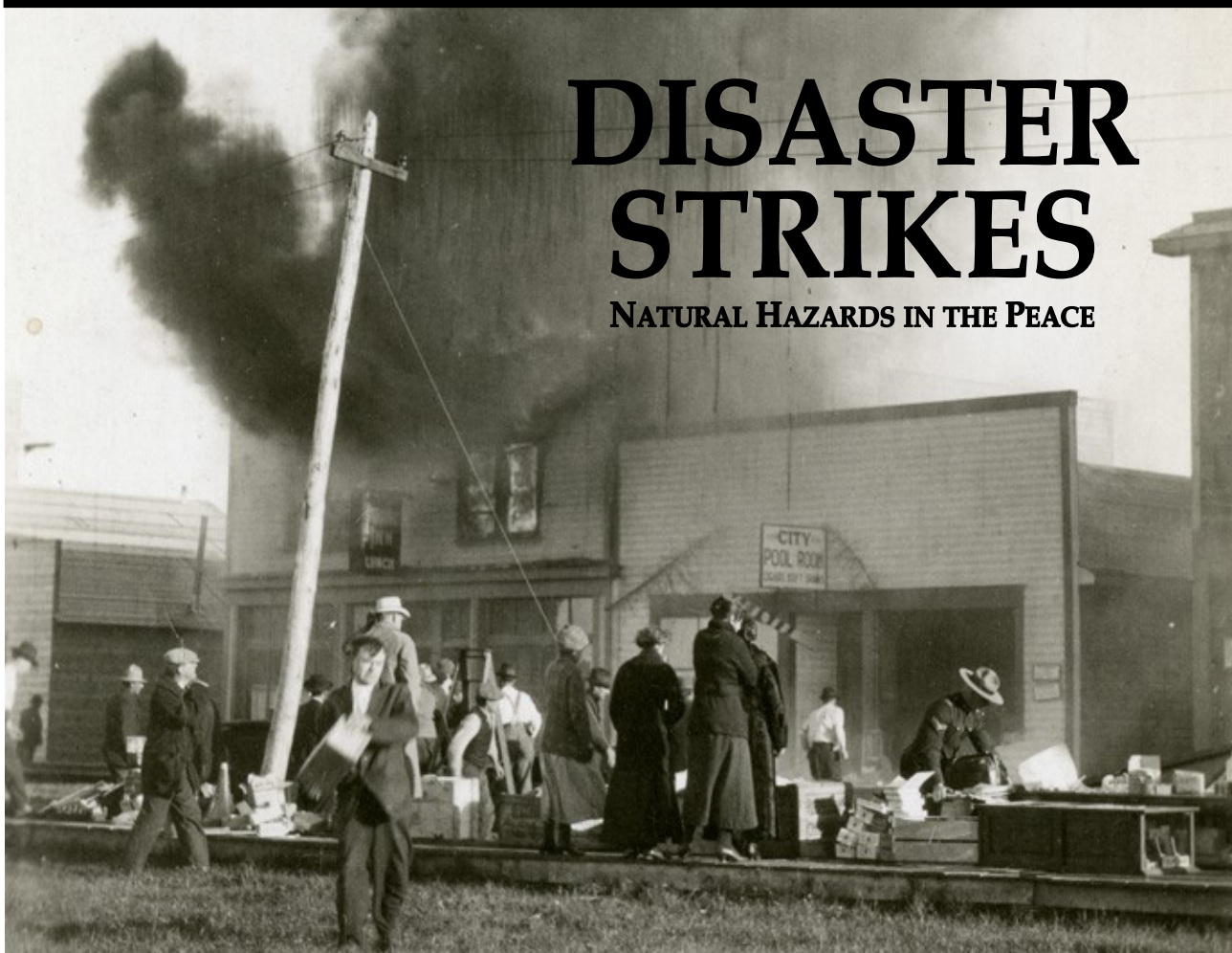
Volume 10

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Issue 2

DISASTER STRIKES

NATURAL HAZARDS IN THE PEACE



PREVENTING DISASTER
AT THE ARCHIVES

FLOODS, FIRES, &
EXTREME WEATHER

SAVE YOUR RECORDS
FROM DISASTER

A PUBLICATION OF THE SOUTH PEACE REGIONAL ARCHIVES

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Cover: People trying to save items from the fire include a man in a R.C.M.P. uniform . Plumes of smoke appear to be coming from the building to the left of the City Pool Hall. 1916 (SPRA 024.01.09.31)

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

Help! This issue of *Telling Our Stories* highlights disasters and natural hazards of the South Peace region. Our staff and volunteers have scoured the Archives' records, to present you with a compilation of natural disasters. In doing so, we also hope to draw your attention to the excellent resources available for consultation at the Archives. These stories tell of challenges, yes, but also of overcoming adversity.

Read about the mass extinction of the wood bison (p.5) and the struggles of the Great Depression (p. 6). Experience the Wanham-Codesa Fire of 1942 (p. 8) and get stuck in the mud on Saddle Mountain (p. 14). Brave hailstones and extreme heat with news clippings from the reference files (p. 16). Sink or swim in the flood waters of Muskoseepi (p. 18) and run for cover when a "common, but rare" tornado hits the Peace (p. 22). Finally, flag your trees as a pine beetle infestation strikes the Peace again (p. 23).

In this issue, we reflect on the disasters of the past in order to prepare for the future. As you ponder the challenges faced by those before us and the determination required to overcome them, consider too the planning that may have mitigated the damage. Have you ever wondered how you can incorporate archival records into your emergency planning (p. 12)? Or how the Archives responds to flash flooding and is preparing to handle future emergencies (p. 20)? Ponder the role of Archives as a form of emergency planning (p. 24) and how you can support us by getting involved (p. 25). After all, the best time to plan for a disaster is before it has happened.



Alyssa Currie

SPRA Executive Director

Take Note

The **Annual General Meeting** for the South Peace Regional Archives is taking place **Saturday, March 30th at 10:00am**. Join us at the Archives for continental breakfast, and updates on the Archives activities. We will conclude the AGM by presenting the prestigious **Beth Sheehan Award**, which recognizes individuals or organizations who have made outstanding contributions to the Archives' mission. This year, the AGM will also feature a panel presentation titled "**The Archives At Work**," which will highlight some of the exceptional ways that community members have put our archival collections "to work." We hope to see you there!

Are you interested in preserving your personal story? Join us for **Document Your Life Story on Monday, March 11th at 6:00pm**, in collaboration with the Grande Prairie Museum. Learn how to pass on your story to future generations through a variety of techniques. Free to attend; Registration required. Please contact the Museum at 780-830-7090 or email culture@cityofgp.com to register.

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.

The Winter the Bison Died

This abridged article was written by Charles Taws, Curator of the Grande Prairie Museum and volunteer member of the Indigenous History Committee. Watch the Archives blog for the complete version.

Wood buffalo (bison) used to roam freely across the Peace— the wild, free roaming herds of western lore and history. The story of the buffalo's extinction in the Peace can be found in the Dunvegan Post Journals, one for 1806 - 1808 and the other 1822 - 1830. The journals include various references to buffalo encounters and hunts, but it's the references in February 1830 that are the clue to the buffalo's demise.

On the 16th we find the following, "Our Two hunters arrived & report of having Killed 53 Buffalos- a great many more than we want & they are not fat enough to make dried Provisions, so that the Meat will be lost.- The snow is so very deep that all large animals cannot run from their pursuers & there will be no doubt a great number wantonly Killed..." Later on the 26th another reference to the severe winter can be found: "We have now had account from all the Beaver Indians and I am sorry to find almost total failure in their hunts- their excuses appear plausible enough- this severe Winter." Thus, historians pin the winter of 1829-1830 as the date of the buffalos demise.

This severe winter alone cannot adequately explain the disappearance of the buffalo. Many buffalo were killed to supply the fur trade demand for pemmican (a portable food source made of dried and pounded meat). Also, the introduction of firearms played a significant role in their extinction. In all probability,

the winter of 1829/30 was not the absolute extinction of the buffalo in the Peace but few were ever seen again. The last one was said to have been shot near Fort St. John in 1906.

The Indigenous peoples centred their life on the buffalo. When they were gone, their society had to readjust to hunting non-herd like animals such as the moose. A mid 17th Century estimate is that there were 168,000 buffalo roaming the northwest corner of this continent. Local buffalo did not migrate like the larger plains variety further south. The grasslands of the Peace were "landlocked" by muskeg and the buffalo had no need to go beyond this area.

When settlers came into the Peace, the buffalo's remains were clear to see. George Dawson recorded in his 1879 report that "buffalo trails still score the sod in all directions... The saucer-shaped 'wallows' of the buffalo and scattered bones are numerous, though the animal is now no more seen here." On his 1899 trek through the Peace, Charles Mair recorded "All along the trail were old buffalo paths and wallows... the only memorials of the animal were its paths and wallows, and its bones half buried."

Northwest of Sexsmith are the Buffalo Lakes, (consisting of Buffalo, Jones and Gummer Lakes). Here the buffalo used to wallow in the shallow waters as a respite from heat and insects. Many buffalo skulls were found by the early settlers who gave the area this name. A living reminder can be seen in the modern buffalo ranches that can be found scattered throughout the Peace Region.

Reading the Great Depression

Resources from the Archives' Reference Library

The Great Depression of the early 1930s was a major economic and social downturn that impacted the entire industrialized world. The western provinces of Canada were among the hardest hit by this downturn, due in part to a heavy reliance on agriculture and crippling droughts. The South Peace experienced many of its struggles, including falling grain prices, farm foreclosures, and homestead abandonments.

However, in spite of widespread despair, this area fared better than most. The impacts of the drought were less severe and fertile soils yielded record-breaking crops. Locals such as Herman Trelle, World Wheat King, raised hope for the South Peace.

This article highlights a selection of books from the Archives' reference library, each providing a unique perspective on the impact of the Great Depression. Visitors to the Archives can access our library free of charge. Due to their irreplaceable nature, reference books must be consulted in the reading room.

Popular History

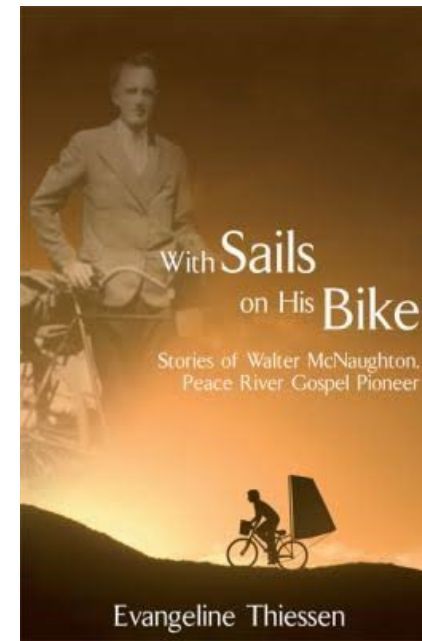
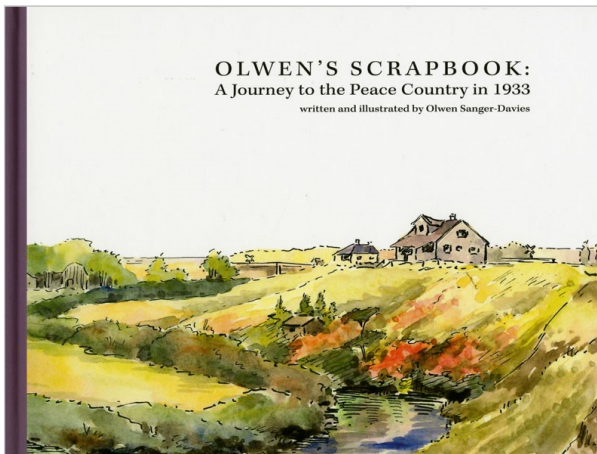
Fury and Futility: Onset of the Great Depression 1930-1935 is the sixth volume of the *Alberta in the 20th Century* series, written by Ted Byfield. This series takes a journalist approach to the province's history. Its use of photographs, maps, illustrations, and sidebars make it an enjoyable read for the popular historian.

Cross-Canadian Stories

Ten Lost Years, 1929-1939, compiled by Barry Broadfoot, is a collection of memories of the Great Depression. It includes stories from more than 600 ordinary men and women from across Canada. These stories are presented as vignettes and compiled into chapters representing different themes and perspectives. Chapter titles include "Bartering Pork Chops for Babies," "You'll be a Better Woman For It," and "They Didn't Consider Indians People."

Positive Perspective

Olwen's Scrapbook: A Journey to the Peace Country in 1933 is a South Peace Regional Archives reproduction of a diary created while the author, Olwen Sanger-Davies, was visiting the Peace River Country from England. *Olwen's Scrapbook* documents the lives and communities of the South Peace with prose and hand-painted and -drawn illustrations. It displays the lives of rural families through summer festivities, school activities, and fall harvest. Olwen's personal account of the Depression era portrays a self-sufficient, forward-looking, and productive people weathering this difficult period with effort and grace.



Bike and a Bible

With Sails on His Bike by Evangeline Thiessen is the story of Walter McNaughton. At 23 years of age and during the Depression, Walter rode his bicycle all the way from Three Hills up to the Peace River Country to establish a Bible School, now known as the Peace River Bible Institute located in Sexsmith. To make his journey easier, Walter attached sails of cloth to catch the wind and increase his speed. The story is based on transcripts of interviews with Walter recorded by his daughter Evangeline in 1977, and on a few diaries, from 1933-1940, found after his death.

A Child's Story

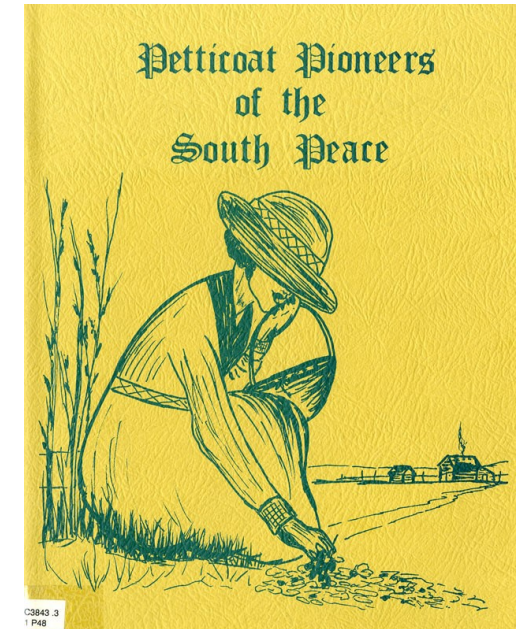
Power of the Peace by Phyllis James offers the story of coming to a live on a farm in the Peace country in the Depression years, told through a child's perspective. This book can be easily enjoyed in a single sitting.

Petticoat Pioneers

Petticoat Pioneers of the South Peace, compiled and edited by Lillian C. York, was produced for the George Dawson Centennial celebrations in 1979. It highlights the life stories of fifteen pioneer women of the South Peace, each selected from a different local community and representing a women's institute. It also includes selected poetry and photographs from several of the institutes.

Work in the Wilderness

People of the Pass by Madelon Truax and Beth Sheehan tells the human interest story of the Monkman Pass. The Monkman Pass Highway Association was formed in the height of the Depression in this area. With scarce jobs and money, young men found an exciting opportunity in building a proposed highway through the Rocky Mountains. Workers received one dollar and three meals a day, along with the opportunity to blaze new trails through the northern wilderness. *People of the Pass* describes these men and their journey creating the Highway.



Special thanks to Archives volunteer Leita Askew for her assistance with this article. Leita is currently developing an index for the Archives' reference library that will support users in locating relevant material.

Fire ^{on} the Farm

Experiencing the Wanham-Codesa Fire of 1942

The following excerpt was taken from the diary of Maria Wozniak. Maria's diary was originally written in Polish, and has been translated and transcribed by her son Mathew. Here she writes about the Wanham-Codesa fire of October 22, 1942.

My husband is in much pain. The next night he can't sleep because of the pain in his leg. October 22, 1942, the owner of the sawmill was driving to the mill in the bush and stopped in to visit us. It was as if the Lord sent him. Seeing him, I asked Mr. James Emerson if he could take Antoni to a doctor. He looked at the leg and said that in Tangent, there was a government nurse and he would take Antoni to her. In a while, we both took Antoni by the arms and led him to the half ton automobile.

Before harvest, my husband built a small pigpen from round trees about 16 x 16 feet and the threshing machine blew straw over it. In the pen was a door about 4 x 4 feet. Inside the pen was spread straw and so prepared a place for our sows and other animals for the winter. 1942 was dry and the fall was without rain.

Mr. Emerson took my husband to the east to Tangent about 20 miles and in the west there began to

Right: Antoni & Maria Wozniak with their two oldest children, Boleslaw (Bill) and Mathew, at the time of their immigration to Canada in 1930. (SPRA 279.02.001a)



appear clouds of smoke. I stood the sick cow "Masia" on her feet. I dropped her a bundle of hay for her to eat.

Fear overtook me about the fire from which so many times I defended our property. The first thing was to harness the horses to the plow and make a fire guard in the field to the west of our buildings so the fire does not come here. Quickly we achieved this task and were ready to plow. Our Eddy did not go to school that day so I took him to the neighbors to the east, Hrishuks, asking them to watch over our son. Fortunately, at the time I was plowing the fire guard, Bill Sanoski came over and took over the plowing. The wind came up about noon and then came approaching danger. While Bill plowed I went with

fast steps to where there was a low place where water gathered in the spring, by that place we had dug a well and got some water. Then I went to the barn and chased the cow and calf out. From the west the fire is coming closer. Already we can see the leaping flames. I ran around like a lunatic, I have very little chance of saving anything.

I take out of the house anything I can carry to the garden. Then came frightening wind like it was a storm. Mr. Sanoski is doing everything he can and keeps

plowing. The fire jumped over in a few places and the whole field is burning. All the pigs are running to their pen where there is much straw. I poured full their troughs with feed that was farther away from the pens. The hogs went to eat because they were hungry. Soon they were ready to return to their pens. I had armed myself with a good stick and stood in the doorway, our two dogs helped me. I know for sure that the straw pile is on fire from the flying sparks. Everywhere there was fire and smoke and it's hard to breathe.

Smoke is hurting my lungs and I am tired. I go to the garden and kneel looking at the burning buildings and granaries with grain in them. The view is frightening and the wind goes like crazy. Seeing the fire, people from the district gathered and began to save our neighbour. They stood in a row, both men and women with wet sacks began to extinguish the fire against the wind and in that way saved our neighbours' buildings. With digging and plowing they were able to save them all. This was the neighbour where our son was staying at.

My husband and Mr. Emerson returned and did not recognize the place. The fire had taken our harvested crop. Somehow our new unfinished house was saved. On that memorable night we sat at our neighbours, Mr. Paupst's place. Here, too, the neighbours helped save the buildings. People that were built to the west of our place, like Tom Bergeron Bouchard, Soquet, Fred Lewis, Wojenski, and Scott and many others, not only lost their buildings but lost livestock.

At 5:00 in the evening, the police came to see if



Above: Wanham's Main Street in 1931 (SPRA 018.03.50)

anyone had lost their lives and how bad were the losses. We lost practically no animals. There were 110 hogs and the cattle were in the pasture where there was not enough grass for the fire to go. In the evening rain began to fall and the ground was covered with snow in the morning of the 23 of October.

A note from Maria's son, Mathew Wozniak:

The fire started some place in Wanham and a matter of a few hours went about 10 miles. Daughter Cecelia was with Bill plowing the fire guard. She said that they were in an open field and flames singed the horses' manes. In those days, bundles were hauled in to be threshed so there was very little to burn, just the stubble. The granaries that were full of grain burned and the grain spilled into a cone and kept smoldering. It was important to keep the livestock from getting to these grain piles. A gallon of grain eaten by an animal that had been on grass would most likely kill it. All land clearing at that time was done with axe, saw, and grub hoe, piled and burned so fires getting away were a common problem.

Disasters

in the South Peace



Above: Richmond Avenue during a September snowstorm, 1937 (SPRA 0032.08.07.006)

Top right: Railway cars were lifted off their wheel bases and overturned in a "weird storm" that resembled a tornado at Rycroft, September 1, 1951 (SPRA 256.02.15)

Bottom right: Smoking remains of Corona Hotel, with crowd of on-lookers in foreground, February 12, 1936 (SPRA 032.08.07.020)



Above: Bear Creek Valley during a flood in 1935. The two houses in the center are those of Peter F. and Peter L. Toews. (SPRA 0502, 2008.067.01)

Right: Snow has stopped the progress of this Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway train on its way to Grande Prairie, 1918 (SPRA Fonds 001, 2001.01.114)

Below: "This was the wreckage right alongside the explosion." Dawson Creek, 1943 (SPRA 291.08.01)



Don't Forget Your Records!

Archival Records in Your Emergency Planning

There are several excellent online resources to help you plan for emergencies like power outages, floods, train derailments, etc. Websites sponsored by the Federal and Provincial governments detail the types of emergencies you should prepare for and suggestions for readiness. The focus of these sites is, of course, on personal protection. Family, friends, pets, and your lovable self, are all the priority in any emergency event. At some point, though, you will need to put your life back together. Shelter, clothing, food, and water will help keep you going. Your records are invaluable for moving beyond survival to regaining control of your life. As much as is safely possible, include consideration for your documents in any evacuation plan.

How do you prepare your personal records for emergency situations? Organization and proper storage of your records is key to moving past the emergency into a rebuilding process. Organizing personal records can seem like a daunting task. Remember that very step is an improvement. It is better to have a so-so system in place than a perfect system in your head. The following is a suggested list of steps to help you prepare your records for an emergency.

Gather Gather all your important documents into one contained place. It could be a closet, a kitchen drawer, or a pile on top of the fridge. None of these are ideal without further preparation, but at least you will not have to run around the house looking for them in the event of an emergency.

Storage Store everything in an enclosed, water-resistant and/or fire-resistant container. This will make it much easier to transport your records, whether to another location in your home or to a safe place outside the home.

Define vital Identification documents and documents that prove insurance plans and ownership of large items are important for everyone. Most of our other records are memory records – photographs, certificates, awards, etc. Which of these memory records are vital to you? Which of your memory records will help you rebuild beyond immediate needs for food, shelter, and safety? If you are like most people, you could probably fit these kinds of records in multiple plastic tubs. The chances of carrying all those out in an emergency are pretty small. To ensure you make the best decisions under stressed circumstances, decide now which of your memory records are vital to you.

Basic Organization Medical papers, identification papers, insurance, home and household ownership, personal papers. This is also a good time to weed through your documents to make sure you are only keeping what you need. If you do experience an emergency, it will lighten your carry load and reduce anxiety because you have only what you need.

Make Copies Arguably, you could do this at any time in the process. Recognizing that you cannot do it all at once, waiting until you have done your basic organization also

allows you to make copies in the order of their importance. You can add copies of additional items as time and money permits. Make physical and digital copies of your most valuable items.

Housing Records For physical items, archival quality plastic sleeves, acid free folders, and archival storage boxes keep your records safe from daily dangers such as moisture and pests, and can help prevent or mitigate damage in the event of an emergency. Label everything as best you can. This is especially important for memory records. You think you will never forget the people in the photographs or the date of your parents' wedding, but you will. Further, while you may recognize the importance of your memory records, future generations may not. If you leave an organized set of records, they are more likely to be preserved because they will seem more manageable than a pile of stuff jammed into a box.

Offsite Storage For physical records, house copies in the same quality storage containers as the original documents. They may become the only documents you have. Suitable offsite locations for physical copies include secure space at your office, with family and friends, or the family cottage. You may not be able to store much outside of your vital documents and a few precious memory documents, but having access at multiple points increases your chances of document recovery and reduces the risk of total loss. For digital records, there are a number of cloud-based resources, including digital scrapbooking that you can use. And never forget your trusty USB and external drives, small items you can keep in your purse, pocket, or a lanyard around your neck.

Share Copies Make gifting special items like scrapbooks and photographs and special, historical family documents, part of your records emergency plan. If you lose your originals, there is a copy somewhere. Regularly sharing, whether with physical or digital copies, ensures that even if all seems lost, not all is lost.

All of this, of course, supposes a major event affecting large segments of a community. But what about those personal catastrophes that leave us stunned, like a job loss, a house fire, a sudden debilitating illness, or a death in the family? Organized records can help in these events as well:

1. A file with records documenting all your training, accomplishments, and contacts can help you put a resume together.
2. Storing copies of your important household documents offsite means you have access to your mortgage/rental agreements, insurance papers, and proof of household items to help you access assistance after a fire.
3. An organized medical file, complete with recent appointments and family medical histories, may just help with the treatment and recovery process.
4. If the worst happens, insurance documents, wills, end of life instructions, and even photograph collections can aid with funeral planning, celebration of life ceremonies, and helping families get back on their feet.

Having organized records will not fix any of these problems. However, knowing where your records are and what they are, may help alleviate some of the pain and anxiety dealing with emergency situation. They also might prevent a short-term emergency from becoming a disaster.

Olwen's Own Words:

"Olwen's Own Words" features excerpts and illustrations from the scrapbooks of Olwen Sanger-Davies.

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. Limited quantities are available.



Stuck in the Mud

Wednesday August 2nd

...we ran, or rather waddled, for three miles through a thunderstorm: with mud, rain, and thunder and lightning all round us, and a ditch on each side, but left it behind and quite suddenly came out into sunshine. However, there had been heavy rain on Saddle Mountain and we stuck twice.



The first time, a passing car climbed, or rather waddled, up to the top of the hill, and then the driver came back and helped push us out of the little ditch into which we had skidded when backing, and we got up in his tracks.

The second time we were hauled up a hill by a team after they had hauled up two other cars who also couldn't do it.

August 10

It was very hot, some "fall wheat" was beginning to turn.

We saw the smoke from forest fires beyond the Wapiti and at night could see the flames.

Purchase your copy of Olwen's Scrapbook today

ONLY \$40.00 +GST
while quantities last



Limited copies!
Cash and cheques are accepted.

Extreme Weather

When starting a research project, the Archives' reference files are the perfect place to begin. The collection of newspaper clippings and other printed materials fill seven filing cabinets, cover hundreds of topics, and include items from the turn of the century to present day. For a more detailed description of the contents, view the finding aid online — Fonds 510: South Peace Regional Archives Reference Files.

Rain "I'm afraid if the sun ever does come out again, it's going to blind me."

"The weather's been so miserable lately, people around here are starting to look forward to winter."

These were the comments of Grande Prairie residents in the August 16, 1957 Herald-Tribune. The land had reached the point of saturation after several weeks of almost daily rain. With the streets and sidewalks turned to mud, it was recommended that the South Peace should drop all paving projects and consider canals instead.

Hailstones On the evening of Sunday, June 4, 1961, the Goodwin district experienced a heavy hailstorm. Hailstones the size of peas covered the ground and reduced visibility to zero, bringing traffic to a standstill. Gardens in the area were severely damaged by the storm. The Herald-Tribune also reports "blinding... lightning bolts [that] made the night weirdly brilliant across the eastern horizon."

News Stories from the Reference Files



Above: Weather Observation Platform: "Copy of an original photograph. USAAF staff and visitor using the observation platform on top of the Valeyview Weather Station. Staff at the station were Seargent Lee Pooler, Seargent William Coe, and Corporal Bachman. Staff were required to send reports by teletype every hour on the different types of clouds, wind direction, cloud ceiling height, and any unusual features like fire." (Lee Pooler fonds, SPRA 0294.12)

Snowstorm In late March of 1963, schools throughout the South Peace were closed due to a late-season snowstorm. Winds gusting up to 38 miles an hour piled up three-foot snowdrifts, and nearly 35 snow plows were "working around the clock to open district roads," a task they expected to take four or five days. Rycroft students were stranded at school after the storm hit on Thursday, and were not expected to be able to return home until sometime that weekend. Most other South Peace students were able to make it home that night, but Friday saw 3000 children enjoying an unexpected holiday.



Above: Mail wagon stuck in the mud, 1941 (SPRA 116.09.01.01.0553)

Lightning The August 4, 1998 Herald-Tribune reported damage caused by a dramatic lightning storm. Between 5:00 Monday evening and 1:40 Tuesday morning, the South Peace was struck by a staggering 6,800 lightning bolts; according to the article, 500 lightning strikes per night would be considered normal.

Damage caused by the storm was extensive. An Alberta Power representative estimated \$15,000 in damage to power lines and transformers. As a result, electrical services were down for up to twelve hours. Two forest fires had been spotted by Tuesday morning, and the Land and Forest Service was on the lookout for more.

High Winds South Peace residents are well acquainted with high winds. The January 15, 1948 Herald-Tribune describes a windstorm with gusts reaching 70 miles per hour, which "caused one chimney fire in the west end, but no other damage except for drifting roads." Snow plows had a hard day's work ahead of them, and encountered an unusual phenomenon on the highways - "In places the snow was rolled into snowballs by the wind."

Cold Snap January of 1935 saw Grande Prairie in "the paralyzing grip" of a record-breaking cold spell. For five weeks, beginning on December 20, 1934, the daily lows were -40 or colder, with only a single day of reprieve from these bitter temperatures. A heavy fog caused by "the condensation of what little moisture remains in the air" accompanied the cold. Grande Prairie residents were cautioned to refrain from outdoor activities, and advised to keep their horses stabled. Still, the Herald reported that the firemen's ball was well attended, giving dancers a chance to "forget the 50 below temperatures." This event was featured in blog posts by volunteer Kathryn Auger (January 29, 2015 and January 19, 2016)

Heat Wave Taking things to the other extreme, Grande Prairie also experiences scorching heat. On July 27, 1998, the Herald-Tribune reported a high of 32.3, just one degree short of the highest recorded temperature in Grande Prairie (33.3 in July of 1934). The summer was also drier than average; on July 30, the water treatment plant pumped 19 million liters into the city, setting a record for water consumption in Grande Prairie in a single day.

Below: Effect of wind erosion near Clairmont, 1931 (SPRA 362.02.06.28)



High Water in Muskoseepi

The earliest inhabitants of the Grande Prairie area gathered in the Bear Creek valley. This location provided a bounty of resources including water, plants, and animals. The area was once named "Moccasin Flats," in recognition of the Indigenous peoples who gathered there. It is now called Muskoseepi, a Cree word meaning Bear Creek. Early inhabitants of the area regularly adjusted their living sites to accommodate the changing flow of the creek; spring run-off and heavy rains were known to trigger increased flow, or even flooding, in the valley.

As non-Indigenous settlers moved to Grande Prairie, the small town developed on and around this area. In 1910, when the Argonaut Company laid out the original townsite of Grande Prairie, the Bear Creek Valley was included. At that time, many of the lots North of Richmond Avenue were legally held by the Argonaut Company and considered uninhabitable. There were a number of homes and buildings in the flats at that time, including a blacksmith shop and Taylor & Shaver, Millers.

Defined land plots and permanent structures provided convenience for settlement and development; however, they also awarded less



Above: The Bear Creek valley near 100 Avenue during the 1920 flood. (SPRA 032.08.08.1058)

flexibility to inhabitants when the creek flow changed. In 1911, only one year later, the Creek flooded and damaged the 100th Avenue bridge.

Official flood records are sporadic and often limited, but the Archives contains a wealth of newspaper clippings, personal accounts, and photographs that document this hazard. While the flood of 1935 is best documented in our records, the flood that occurred during spring of 1965 was most devastating. On April 26th, the Grande Prairie Herald reported that "the ice in Bear Creek has not started to break up yet, the flood waters coming down to a depth of close to six

feet over the ice" and that "damage may be quite extensive before the flood ebbs." Numerous homes were evacuated and damaged as a result of the flood. Nevertheless, people continued to build in the valley. In 1971, the Grande Prairie Museum was built on the banks of Bear Creek. By this time, many land owners had sold their property to make way for a new city park. Muskoseepi was officially opened to the public in 1986. The last private home in the flats, belonging to Fred Abbott, had been destroyed only one year prior, when Fred was forced to move into a retirement home. (For more information, read "The Last Holdout" in *Telling Our Stories*, September 2012 issue—available online).

Numerous factors contribute to flooding risk in Muskoseepi: building within the floodplain and flood risk areas; changes to the Creek's path altering its flow; degradation of the channel downstream from the reservoir; and more.

In 2018, the Archives experienced the flood risk in Muskoseepi, firsthand. High water levels in the Bear Creek reservoir and potential flash flooding downstream prompted the activation of the Emergency Coordination Centre. This in turn prompted an evacuation of Muskoseepi Park, including the Archives. Luckily, the Archives did not experience any damage and this incident served as a trial of the Archives' emergency response plan. Archives staff enacted a priority-based response and

temporary relocation. The new off-site location served as a safe, alternate location for work and materials until the evacuation order was lifted. Since then, we have continued to develop the Archives emergency response plan, including an evacuation checklist and incident report with lessons learned. To learn more about how the Archives responded to this event, and how we are preparing to handle future emergency events, see page 20.



Above: Bear Creek Valley during the 1935 flood. The photograph is probably taken from the train trestle looking north-east. (SPRA 0528.02.02)

Did you know? The Archives is bordered by 100-year flood hazard zones on the North, East, and South (Alberta Flood Hazard Map, 2018). It is also located within a geohazard risk zone three, a 'buffer' zone (Bear Creek Corridor Geo-Hazard Slope Stability & Erosion Assessment Report).



1911 The first of several floods that damages the 100th Avenue bridge. The bridge is damaged and repaired again in 1912, 1920 and 1931.

1935 Excessive rainfall causes flooding throughout the South Peace. Flooding in Bear Creek prompts the evacuation of many homes.

1965 This is the third year of flooding in a row, and also the worst flood on record. Both homes and infrastructure are devastated.

1974 This flood prompts a new report on flooding in the Bear Creek valley and the reconstruction of the reservoir spillway in 1975-76.

1990 The largest and best-documented flood since 1965. The peak flow is more than double the second highest recorded in 1974.

2018 High water levels in the Bear Creek reservoir and potential flooding downstream prompts an evacuation of Muskoseepi Park.

Flash Flooding Emergency!

SPRA Evacuation Response: Lessons Learned

In the last days of April 2018, a flash flood risk within the Bear Creek corridor prompted the City of Grande Prairie to evacuate Muskoseepi Park. This evacuation included the South Peace Regional Archives, housed in the Grande Prairie Museum. On day two of the evacuation, SPRA staff was granted thirty minutes of access by the site administrator. This article will briefly discuss our actions taken, how our emergency planning helped with those actions, lessons we learned, and how we are moving forward.

After receiving permission enter the building, the director and archivist created a list of actions for the thirty-minute time frame. Thanks to the help of three volunteers, we accomplished more than planned: we moved every item from the bottom shelves of the vault, the reference room, and the offices to the top shelves; removed on-loan items and accession records; returned display items to the vault; and removed vital institutional records. We deposited all the removed items at our newly rented off-site storage space downtown. Regularly visiting our emergency plan was pivotal to our success that evening.

When I say regularly, I mean once or twice every three months- enough to allow us to report our progress to our board. We *should* work on our emergency plan on a more regular schedule. However, like most archives, we work with limited staff resources. Reporting deadlines help us return to important, long-term projects while we manage the pressing day-to-day work. Our emergency plan remains in a perpetual draft stage, but a draft is better than no plan at all. In

our case, that draft helped us successfully manage an evacuation, safely and effectively.

Our planning process includes the Grande Prairie Museum. We lease space at the back of their building and work regularly with the staff on programming and displays. Because we share space and resources, we also discuss how to share emergency resources. The museum budgets for salvage and recovery materials that protect the building and their physical collections. We budget for (read: try to get free) materials that focus on personal safety and management, a general kit to augment museum tools and equipment, and salvage materials suitable to our holdings. It is a slow process, but every year our kits grow, and we have an itemized acquisition plan to build more.

Besides tools and personal safety equipment, two of the most important items in our kit are a map of the vault with the general locations of holdings (photographs, municipal records, personal fonds, etc.) and a priority salvage list. We know what we have and we know where we need to start. If necessary, we can direct others to remove or protect holdings for us. Even though we did not have access to these lists during the evacuation, we were familiar enough with them to create an evacuation plan on the spot. As an institutional member of the Archives Society of Alberta (ASA), we also have access to a number of valuable resources related to disaster preparedness and recovery. During our evacuation, we remained in close contact with the ASA, who provided additional support and guidance. Luckily, a flash flood did not

occur and these emergency items were not required after the initial evacuation. The storage tote we keep them in did provide extra seating at our off-site for the two and a half days we worked there.

This emergency created a valuable, no-harm-done learning experience. We noticed a number of missing actions required: call out lists for staff; extra keys offsite; and stackable plastic totes to remove and store items, to name a few. Of all the lessons we learned, three stand out.

First, we learned the value of an off-site location to store emergency kits and lists, and as temporary workspace. Access to the building provided us a place to get us started and somewhere to work. If the situation had been a little messier (as in, wetter), we would have needed to scrounge or purchase tools and protective gear— a waste of valuable time. We now keep our kits offsite, as well as maps and priority lists. If we did not have our offsite, we would consider investigating borrowed personal or office space from local organizations to store some of these items and potentially as temporary workspace.

Second, we really needed an evacuation checklist. It might seem like a small thing but checklists keep you focused and calm...ish. Because they are a plan. Moreover, while we knew our holdings priorities, we missed a few things in the excitement, like our work calendars. Our summer student, on the ground for day three, suggested a checklist broken into possible evacuation times: five minutes to get out - ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes. We used our makeshift list to create a more formal checklist which we now store offsite.

Third, when all seems lost, all is not lost. The South Peace Regional Archives has over 6,000 digitized images available online. Our website features over 600

described fonds and collections, many with detailed histories and extensive item level lists. In our case, because we have offsite storage, we have 120 m of textual material and thousands of photographs from individuals and organizations around the South Peace. There are approximately 4m of our institutional records offsite as well as archival processing materials. We have an external back up of all our computer work and digitized collections and photographs. It would be tragic to lose all the physical holdings, but we had enough to start again, if necessary. This is essentially the work of archives: we can never save it all. We can save enough to keep society's memory strong enough to move forward. We kept this in mind as we evacuated our priority items and then watched the creek crest. It is something we keep in mind as we improve our plan.

Emergency planning is ongoing. It is never “wrapped up,” partly because it tends to move to the bottom of day-to-day priority list. The emergency is not happening *today*, after all. Repeatedly returning to emergency planning means that even if we are not perfectly prepared, we are more prepared than we used to be. Our draft plan helped us in this incident. This incident reminded us that the continued process of emergency planning would help us in the future.

Below: Contents of the Archives' Emergency Response Kit



Touching Down on Tornadoes

The “Common, But Rare” South Peace Event

The following article was contributed by Duff Crerar. Duff serves as the Secretary of the Board of Directors and member of the Indigenous History Committee.

When the skies turn black, winds howl and rain comes down like bullets, Peace Country folk have learned to run for cover. On almost two dozen occasions (that have been recorded), this unforgettable type of extreme weather has touched down on the Peace Region. Our records include several accounts, especially from newspapers, of these sudden and violent natural threats. Although relatively rare this far North, they were not unexpected. In fact, meteorologists consider the Peace the tail end of the legendary Tornado Alley, which begins in the American Plains and stretches in an arc across North America ending near the Yukon border.

Nor do all Peace Country tornadoes strike in late summer, as the 4 May, 2008 Sturgeon Lake storm demonstrated. One huge funnel cloud appeared on the lake and split into two. The result was chaos. Sturgeon Lake was the scene of an earlier twister which also rampaged along the South shore in August, 1981, throwing trees into cabins and creating chaos in the campgrounds. The storm was not entirely unexpected, said the park spokesman, and no structures at Young’s Point or Williamson provincial campgrounds were hit. Both would be cleaned up by the weekend and business would resume in no time. However, shaken food concession worker Nyana Kerr, who had scooped up her two small children and raced for her house, told reporter John Ludwick it was like being, for five or six minutes, in a TV disaster movie.



Above: Damage suffered by nature during 1991 tornado at Sturgeon Lake. (SPRA 002.05.04.180)

Similar experiences have been recorded in the newspaper columns from across the Peace since 1909 (the Shaftsbury Settlement) to the recent Grande Prairie tornado which left a trail of downed power poles and broken buildings from near Richmond Avenue straight up Clairmont Road towards the Safeway store. In all accounts, though material destruction was extensive, few people were injured or killed. In 1963 Bison Lake was the scene of a rare waterspout, which witnesses reported moaned like a jet engine. High Prairie had the nerve-rattling experience of two tornadoes at the same time, though meteorologists still claimed in 1989 that residents did not have to worry as long as the funnel clouds did not touch down. They predicted that radio announcements would give at least 20 minutes warning. Readers of the *Daily Herald Tribune* were probably not very reassured when reporter Stephen Fletcher quoted a local meteorologist: Tornadoes, he said, are “common, but rare”. Doppler radar and improved broadcasting now give better warnings, thankfully, to those who are tuned in.

Pine Beetles Invade

The public often holds a misconception about archives and the records in our care: that the material is ‘old news.’ Contrary to this belief, the Archives holds a wide range of records that date to present day. The reference files are a vast resource, comprising of approximately 100,000 news clippings, pamphlets, and other documents. These records are donated by community members and meticulously clipped, compiled, and indexed by volunteers.

Nestled among the Forestry Industry reference files, one file includes recent news clippings related to the infestation of pine beetles in the South Peace. Pine beetles are a devastating insect pest, native to western North America. In 2006, when the first signs of pine beetle reached the South Peace, it was the furthest north the beetles had been reported.

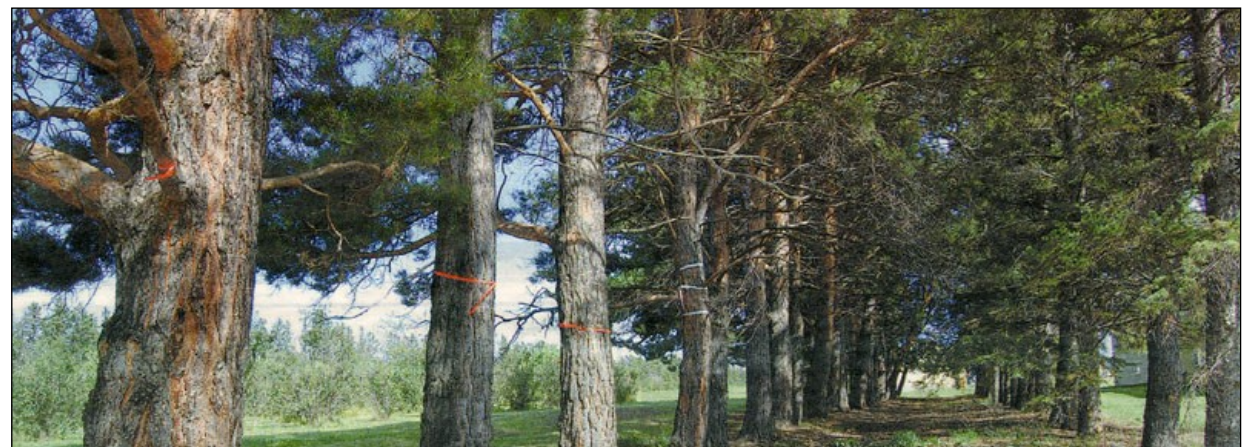
By June 2009, the Municipal District of Spirit River reported 355 pines lost to the pest (Central Peace Signal, 30 June 2009). On August 7th of that year, the front page of the Beaverlodge and District News de-

clared “Pine beetles invade Beaverlodge: Infestation has spread to ‘every large pine in town.’” Areas throughout the County of Grande Prairie and Municipal District of Greenview were similarly impacted.

The Pine Beetle reference file chronicles the devastating effects of the infestation, as well as the responses by local governments. It includes articles as recent as December 2018 and, with the infestation still affecting our area, more are likely to be added.

Do you have a print subscription to a local newspaper and would like to contribute to the reference files? Consider donating your used newspapers to the Archives! We are seeking the Daily Herald Tribune, Town & Country News, Central Peace Signal, and Valleyview Town & Country.

Below: “The crimson ribbons indicate that all these mature pines at the Research Farm will have to be removed,” Photograph by Don Sylvester, Beaverlodge and District News, Friday 7 August 2009. (SPRA Reference Files 510.13.20)



Archiveology: Archives as Emergency Planning

Archives are critical repositories of history and heritage. They contain vital records that can help prove or restore identity, rebuild communities, unearth long-forgotten and societal-changing events. Because of this, Archives should be considered a vital component for a community's disaster and recovery plan.

By necessity, an archives building should be a solid structure, fire resistant, well away from flood risk areas, with no windows in the holdings area. They have to be solid to hold the weight of multiple shelves laden with paper, fire resistant because the collections are flammable, away from flood risk to avoid water as well as the mold and mildew that develops in damp conditions, and relatively windowless for better environmental protection. These buildings keep documentary heritage physically safe.

The people who work in these buildings, archivists and support staff, are part of that structure of safety. The archival functions they perform— acquisition, arrangement and description, and preservation— ensure the records are safe and accessible. They also ensure that access, whether it is through public awareness programs, creating displays, or retrieving material for researchers, does not compromise the safety of the collections. Archives thus serve both present and future users.

Arrangement is an integral part of this structure of safety; maintaining the contextual information about the holdings in our care ensures that the people who come to the Archives are not faced with the prospect of sifting through piles of stuff. This 'stuff' tends to be

ignored, forgotten, and eventually tossed when people stumble on it and how no idea what it contains.

In preparation for a localized natural or human-made disaster, the best way to use Archives as part of your disaster recovery plan is to donate your records. If you own or are part of a business, organization, local government office, or agency, a records management program that includes regular, scheduled disposition to an archival repository could make your emergency recovery actions less stressful and potentially make an emergency less of a disaster. Once people are safe and you have a safe space to work in, the archived records of your business or organization are still accessible to assist with getting back to business, even if your current records no longer are.

Archives can be part of a network of disaster and recovery plans. Sharing copies of original documents, providing off-site digital records back-up storage, or sharing resources to work toward recovery, are all ways archives and other heritage institutions can help each other in the event of a disaster whether it be fire, leaking pipes, or political upheaval.

One final thought about the importance of Archives in disaster and recovery planning: what makes Archival buildings safe havens for documentary heritage and other essential records also makes them ideal locations for people in the event of an emergency. This is not a long term solution but might provide immediate relief in a sudden event, or a hub of relief planning and documenting the displaced. When the event is over, the evidence of those activities, can be archived for use in future troubling events.

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Join the Board of Directors

The South Peace Regional Archives **Board of Directors** is seeking knowledgeable and engaged individuals to assist in the promotion, maintenance, and governance of the Society.

Members of the Board meet quarterly to discuss the needs of the Archives, approve annual budgets, and make policies for managing and operating the Society. Additional commitments may include attending special meetings of the board, representing the Archives' at events, or serving on ad hoc committees.

If you would like to learn more about becoming a member, please contact Jan Shields, President of the Board, at js-gprc@telus.net. Board Members will be nominated and elected at the Annual General Meeting: **March 30th, 10am**.

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Join a Committee

The **Awareness Committee** and **Indigenous History Committee (IHC)** are seeking enthusiastic individuals to join us in promoting and advising our organization. Meetings are hosted at the Archives and open to all who are interested.

Are you an action-oriented individual interested in promoting the Archives and the history of the South Peace? Members of the **Awareness Committee** plan and implement programs to raise the public profile of our organization. The next meeting is **March 8th, 10am**.

Are you knowledgeable or curious about Indigenous cultural heritage in the South Peace? Members of the **IHC** support the Archives in its efforts towards Reconciliation. The next meeting is **March 27th, 10:30am**.

We're Hiring!

The Archives is currently accepting applications for the position of Archives Assistant (Student) .

- Gain valuable experience in the heritage field
- Engage in hands-on training in the Archives
- Liaise with the Indigenous History Committee
- Process archival materials for consultation
- Prepare and present educational content

Visit www.SouthPeaceArchives.org/Careers for full job posting, eligibility criteria, and application information. This position is contingent on funding from the Young Canada Works Program.

We would like to gratefully acknowledge



The South Peace Regional Archives are very grateful for a Non-Profit Pro Account, compliments of Flickr.

Flickr is an online image hosting service. The Archives utilizes Flickr to increase accessibility by providing a platform to host and share records. Through Flickr, we have made available more than 1200 local newspaper clippings and paper artifacts related to veterans on our Soldier's Memorial. We also utilize Flickr to make available rural newspaper collections which are also indexed on our website.

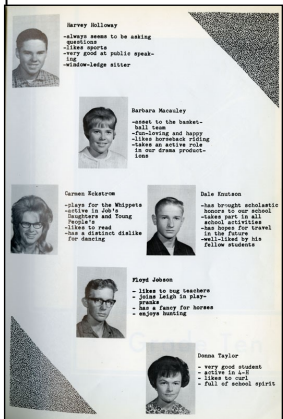
New at the Archives

Thank You Donors!

The South Peace Regional Archives could not exist without thoughtful and timely donations from members of the community.

We were delighted when Paulette Hyrchiw brought in a campaign poster for her brother, Paul Pivert. Thanks to Paul, we have an invaluable collection of photographs documenting life and people in Grande Prairie and the surrounding area. We have few records about Paul, which makes this poster a welcome addition to our holdings.

Photographs documenting life in Clairmont and Beaverlodge in the mid-1920's arrived by mail, courtesy of Marjorie Carlson of British Columbia. These labeled scrapbook pages, containing 75 photographs, document teaching life and life on the farm in these communities.



Many special thanks to Janice Willsey for her recent donation-for-copy Beaverlodge and Wembley school yearbooks. School yearbooks contain a wealth of personal and community information in one easy-to-read location. We are scanning these books to digital and will return the originals to Janice once the project is complete.

Pg 36 from 2019.001.01.

Our library grew a little bit more this month thanks to a donation of several local and topical histories by the staff at the Daily Herald Tribune, including *Gone Wild: A collection of pencil art by Peace Region artist Calvin Cornish*. This little gem adds to our growing holding related to art and artists in the region.



Phyllis Stewart

The South Peace Regional Archives is sad to announce the death of long-time supporter, Phyllis Stewart. Phyllis passed away on January 17, 2019

Phyllis Stewart moved to Bezanson in 1946 to begin a 30-year teaching career teaching at Bezanson school. She would later teach at eleven different schools throughout the South Peace. Phyllis volunteered at the Archives and was awarded the Beth Sheehan Award for her dedication to the Society in 2007.

Fonds 059: The Phyllis Stewart fonds includes family, farm, and personal records, as well as materials from the Bezanson School District.

*Above: Phyllis Stewart, [1948]
(SPRA 0059.02.02.01s, cropped)*

*Below: Bezanson School Picnic. Mrs. Phyllis Stewart with her students from Bezanson School enjoying a school picnic on an island in the Smoky River in June 1947.
(SPRA 0059.02.02.06, cropped)*



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*.

Thank you for supporting



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