

THE MANDATE OF SPRIA 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, THESE RECORDS REFLECT THE PERSONAL, CULTURAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL LIFE OF THE SOUTH PEACE RIVER COUNTRY OF ALBERTA AND ARE IN ALL FORMATS AND MEDIA, INCLUDING TEXTUAL RECORDS, MAPS, PLANS, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES, FILM, VIDEO, SOUND RECORDINGS, ESTABLISHED IN 2000, THE FIRST

SELF-GUIDED

HISTORICAL

# CEMETERY WALKING TOUR



WORLD WARS I AND II  
GRANDE PRAIRIE CEMETERY



PRODUCED BY

SOUTH PEACE REGIONAL ARCHIVES

# Introduction

For several years, South Peace Regional Archives has run historical walking tours of cemeteries around the South Peace. The theme of this booklet is World Wars I and II. Each story has some connection to one or both of the wars, whether the person was a veteran, or their life was affected by the wars in some other way.

The full tour takes approximately 1.5 hours to complete. It may be done in sections over several visits, out of order, or skipping some stops. A map in the centrefold shows the location of each stop. The Grande Prairie Cemetery (84 Avenue and 112 Street) has two sections, East (new) and West (old). This tour covers selected graves in both sections. As you walk and read, look for connections between the people on the tour. It is interesting to note how often they were involved in each others’ lives.

We hope you enjoy learning more about the people and events that have made this community what it is today. If you have any questions, please contact or visit us.

## South Peace Regional Archives

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The purpose of SPRA is to gather, preserve, and share with the public records in any format which reflect the history of the area.

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Cover image: Canadian National Vimy Memorial, Vimy, Pas-de-Calais, France. Taken by Lane Borstad.

# 1 - William & Ralph Witherly

Although William’s grave is not on the tour, a letter he wrote tells us in his own words what it was like to be on the battlefield. William was born in 1887 in New Brunswick to parents Thomas & Alice. In 1915 William, or Bill, along with his brother Ralph, “hiked” to Edmonton to join the army.

William’s letter was published in the Grande Prairie newspaper on January 23, 1917.

Cpl. W.C. Witherly  
B.Coy, 31 Can, BEF  
Somewhere in France

December 9, 1916

To The Secretary of the Agnes Forbes Auxiliary and All the Members

Received your letter a day or so ago and it was all the more welcome since I was not aware that I had any friends in that part of the country. I thank you for the kind interest you have shown and for the good wishes and assurance of a welcome back to “God’s country.”

It does one good to know that some of the people in his own corner of the earth remember that there is a war, and that some of us are here in France.

Come here with me for a minute or so, do you hear that murmur of distant thunder? That is a bit of war news in the making, 40 or 50 miles away you can only hear the mumble of “Heavies” 8 inch Howitzers, the largest siege guns and naval pieces.

If you could visit this village in daylight you find a scene typical of the war zone in France or Belgium. There is not a roof left, not a bit of glass, not a house that hasn’t a few shell holes, at least, some have one, some two, some three walls standing. Some have one or two rooms fairly good and the rest blown to bits; some are gone entirely and only a shell hole and a heap of broken bricks remain. One-time orchards show only broken stumps. Farm machinery lies all about – American binder, and English mowers, and yesterday down by the creek I found the greater part of a Singer sewing machine. There were bits of clothing, boots, kiddies’ toys – all sorts of things. Even if the guns were quiet, a few minutes’ look around would bring home the fact that there had been fighting here not so long ago. In a sheltered corner of one ruin I found what was once a sniper’s nest. It was a nice place for it with a good view and had been used successively by German, French, and British soldiers; for I found used cartridges of each mixed together.

Within 500 yards of where I sit now is, or was, a church. It certainly was a fine building at one time, all of stone and of a design and style particular to this country. Part of two walls and the greater part of the tower are still standing and the rest is a jumble of block and stone, great pillars, and the debris of iron-work and slates.

*We, the Canadians, are not very well liked by our “friend” the enemy... So far, at least, we’ve never left a trench except for one or two reasons: either relieved by another battalion, or with fixed bayonet, out over the sandbags, across the narrow strip or shell cursed country, known for some as “No Man’s Land,” ... through whatever was left of Fritz’s barbed wire and into his front line trench. The balance only takes a few minutes. The occupants are either prisoners or “good” Germans, and we have a new trench which we didn’t have to dig.*

*And of those who are wounded going over. No matter how they feel, the news that we got the front line, and maybe the second or third, for luck, always brings a grin to the face of even the most seriously wounded man, and for the moment he forgets all about the broken arm, or the shrapnel in his shoulder or lungs, or the smashed hand, that has insured him a trip to the ‘Blighty Wagon’ as they call the ambulance, and probably a trip to ‘Blighty’ and a few weeks’ rest.*

*They (the Fritzys) say we take no prisoners. We know better. But the least vindictive of men will, when his chum is sniped beside him, first care for him... and then watch carefully for the guilty... and when he sees him. Well you can’t blame him that he takes a clean fine sight before he tightens his trigger finger, or that he consoles his wounded chum with, “I got the dirty beggar.”*

*Gen. Sherman said that “War is Hell.” I wonder if that would quite express his thought were he permitted to see a modern battle line. Personally I seldom if ever hold a grudge at all, but I’ve lost a good chum, killed. My best friend in the army is badly wounded over in Blighty. My brother [Ralph] was hit right beside me, the same shell pretty well buried us both. He will get well all right and will probably be in the firing line again by spring, but just the same I have some debts to pay though not as many as I had three months ago.*

The letter goes on to wish the ladies well and let them know how much the letters are appreciated by the men overseas. And he signs off with -

*I remain yours truly,*

*One of the boys*

By 1918 it is reported that Bill had been twice wounded, but he survived the war and married, worked as a mechanic, and eventually moved to Burnaby, B.C. where he died at the age of 79. His brother Ralph recovered from that shell explosion and married, also went on to work as a mechanic, and passed away in Enderby, B.C. in 1983. Their parents and some of their sisters are buried in Glen Leslie Cemetery.

*Source: Grande Prairie Herald, January 23, 1917*

## 2 - Arnold Dryer (43-15)

Arnold Dryer was born in Hanna, Alberta in 1914 and served overseas during World War II. Violet Remnant was a 16 year old shop assistant in Surrey, England, not far from the Canadian Army Base in Aldershot. Arnold and Violet met at a dance held there. Arnold’s squadron was billeted nearby, and when his squadron moved, they began a correspondence which lasted throughout the war. Part of one of Arnold’s letters reads -

*Well dearest am still kicking, have lost a little weight but am feeling fine, I guess it is from lack of sleep and not eating at regular hours. I have just finished digging in for the night and am looking forward to a night’s sleep. I sure have been scared a few times and some of [the] things we went through, I did a bit of praying and had my fingers crossed. I am getting farther away from you every day...*

When the war ended, they were afraid that Arnold would be sent home, so with only four days’ notice they planned a wedding.

After the marriage, Arnold was indeed sent back to Canada, and he returned to farming in the Hermit Lake area west of Grande Prairie. Vi waited for permission from the Canadian Wives Bureau to join him. She was discharged from the Air Force and put in time helping at the local post office.

In June 1946 she sailed on the Aquitania with Betty Eskdale, another bride bound for Grande Prairie. Violet’s sister-in-law, Mrs. Robert Dryer, sailed at the same time, but on a ship of wives with babies. The war brides were processed through immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, and from there took a train across Canada.

The event was recorded by the Daily Herald-Tribune with a front page article and headline, “Three War Brides Arrive in Grande Prairie.” Neighbours also welcomed the bride with a wedding shower, and the young couple settled down to farming in the Peace Country. Although Vi was “homesick off and on” over the next year, she enjoyed farm life and the many good neighbours.

After 31 years of marriage and three children, Arnold died on November 28, 1977. His wife Violet still resides in Grande Prairie.

*Source: Arnold’s obituary, 1977 DHT; SPRA Fonds 553, Violet Dryer fonds*

*Right: Arnold & Violet Dryer on their wedding day in Wrecclesham, Surrey, England, in 1946. Violet’s royal blue dress was purchased with clothing coupons as war rations were still on in England. (SPRA 553.02)*





### 3 - Bob, Bert, & Bill Bessent (33-65)

Herbert was born in Gillingham, England on April 11, 1895. In 1948 he received a commemorative medallion as a reminder of his part in the liberation of Mons in World War I. A park in Grande Prairie was named after him in 2014. But this tour will focus on his sons Bob and Bill.

Bill and Bob Bessent were 17 year old twin brothers who joined the RCAF in September 1942, along with many other Canadian boys. From the time they were born, Bill and Bob were never apart. That is, until they joined 405 Pathfinder Squadron in December 1943.

Their two pilots were Ed Drew and Don Patterson. Don chose Bill for his mid upper gunner and Ed Drew picked Bob for the same position.

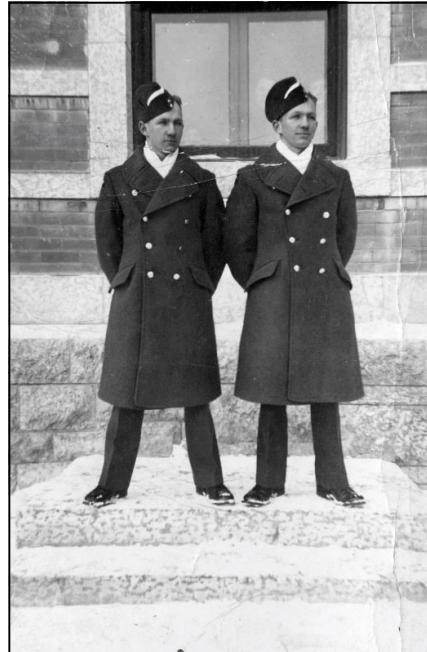
On December 16, 1943 Bob went on his first operation with Ed. Bill went to the gunnery to see him off, as well as their boyhood friend, Gerald Strang. Bob and Gerald were dressing when Bill got there and they had already had their briefing. Bill had not yet been on an operation, so it was rather exciting to go and be with his brother and friend, especially after months of training.

It took some time for Bob and Gerald to dress since they were gunners and had to get their heated suits on. The trucks then came and picked them up to take them with their crews to the bombers. At this point, Bill said goodbye and went back to his billet. Little did he know that he would never see Bob and Gerald again.

The bombers were returning to England from a raid on Berlin when they crashed in the early hours of December 17. The fog came in and the bombers simply ran out of fuel when trying to find a place to land. Three 405 Squadron Lancasters crashed that night due to the fog. Of the twenty-one men in these three bombers, fourteen died that night, one a few days later from his injuries, three would die in future crashes and only three (one from each bomber) would survive the war. [This event became known as Squadron 405's Black Thursday]

Sometime in the early hours of December 17, someone came to tell Bill Bessent about the crash and to share the horrible news that his twin brother, Bob, and friend Gerald Strang had both been killed.

The funerals of the men lost took place at Cambridge City Cemetery on December 22, 1943 with full service honours accorded to the men.



*Above: Twin brothers Bob & Bill Bessent, 1944 (SPRA 292.02.10)*

On December 24, 1943, Bill did his first and only operation from 405 Squadron. This operation was to Berlin and took place only two days after he stood beside his brother Bob's coffin.

Before going on that trip, Bill remembers very well being called into the Group Captain's office and being asked if he was ready to fly so soon after the funeral. Bill replied by saying that if his crew was flying, he'd be flying with them. As Bill recalls, he really found out what war was like on that first operation.

The whole crew was nervous because they were going to Berlin, the same target Bob had been to before he lost his life on Black Thursday. Berlin was very heavily fortified by searchlights, guns and fighters. In Bill's words, if you weren't scared, you weren't normal.

Everyone was trained to do what they were supposed to do and the crew focused on their individual tasks. It was quite a sight because there were lots of fires, searchlights, and flak. Bill could see other planes in the bomber stream, up close. And he also saw bombers going down. It was quite an experience for Bill because he'd heard about such incidents, but this was the first time he'd actually seen them. It wouldn't be his last time witnessing such horrific scenes.

Bill and his crew were then posted to 426 Squadron in Yorkshire, where they would go on to do 29 more operations. They completed their tour on August 11, 1944.

Even though Bill only stayed with the 405 for a few weeks, he never forgot the events that took place there.

Back in Grande Prairie on December 23 the newspaper reads –

*Four Grande Prairie Boys With RCAF Overseas Are Killed in Action*

*Dead from Grande Prairie were Bob Bessent, Gerald Strang, Kelly Wright & Harold Saunders... and the article goes on to talk about the boys.*



It was a very tragic day for the families of Grande Prairie.

*Source: A tribute to Bob Bessent and all the 405 Squadron members who crashed that night from a twin brother and fellow RCAF member who was there and never forgot. Interview done by Jane Piling-Cormick with Bill Bessent in 2006 in Grande Prairie.*

<http://www.ww2-pathfinders.co.uk/405%20Sqd%20BTH2.html>; WWII service file for Bob Bessent; Herald-Tribune

*Left: Bill Bessent receiving the Distinguished Flying Medal I from Governor General Field Marshall Earl Alexander in 1946. (SPRA 2005.73.01)*



#### 4 - Field of Honour (Row 21)

The Grande Prairie cemetery has a couple of sections designated “Field of Honour” and you’ll notice a large concentration of stones bearing Canadian national and regimental symbols. These are provided to veterans of Canada’s armed forces in recognition of their service to our country. Not all veterans have this style of stone; neither are all veterans buried in the “Field of Honour.” Many men (and women) from the Grande Prairie area participated in the great conflicts of the last century; some of them are buried in this cemetery. It is interesting to see Grande Prairie’s connection with the wider world through its citizens who left to fight.

Grande Prairie’s first volunteers for World War I had to travel out, often on foot, to enlist and usually signed up in Edmonton, Calgary, or their own Eastern hometowns. A recruitment drive went through the Peace Country in June 1915 stopping at Beaverlodge, Lake Saskatoon, Grande Prairie, and other communities. Other recruitment drives followed. Conscription started in 1917 and Grande Prairie continued to send more men. Even members of the clergy joined up, including Canon Frederick Smith, Reverend Hugh Speke, and Father Josse.

Beyond just affecting the lives of those who served and their families and friends, the war also had an impact on the Grande Prairie area as a whole. In 1918, the Soldiers Settlement Board was established and each veteran was allowed two quarter-sections of land and loans for seed grain. Many decided to take land in the Peace River Country.

The first World War II recruitment drive in Grande Prairie occurred in April 1940, although many had already traveled to Edmonton and elsewhere to enlist. Recruiting continued over the next years of the war. As of October 1940, the Peace River region had topped all others in Alberta for the number of enlistees. Also in 1940, a reserve militia training centre was established in Grande Prairie and by 1941, as recruitment continued at high levels, a separate unit of the 2nd Battalion of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment was established – it was known as D Company. Many women joined the Women’s Auxiliary of D Company or the Canadian Women’s Army Corps, became nurses, or joined the workforce.

The Training Centre closed in 1944, although the D Company Reserve Unit still occupied the Armoury. Once again, under the Veterans Land Act, veterans were each eligible for a half-section of land and many chose to call the Peace Country home.



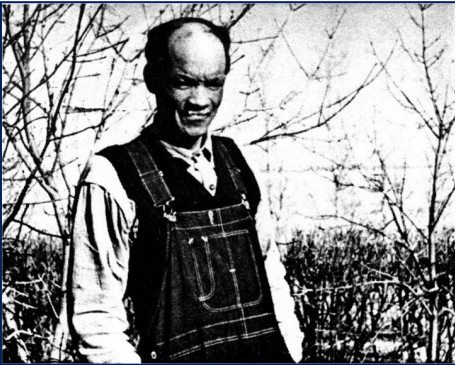
Above: Scene from the trenches, 1916. (SPRA 194.02)



Above: Young boy watches a D- Company Army training exercise in Grande Prairie, ca. 1942. The courthouse is visible in the background. (SPRA 252.02.16)

#### 5 - Cyril Mervyn Clarke (21-26)

Cyril Clarke’s grave is unmarked, but it is situated between Kerr, left, and Botting, right. Cyril Mervyn Clarke was born August 6, 1882 on St. Vincent’s Island in the West Indies. His father was an Anglican minister and his mother West Indian. He attended Oxford University and was a classmate of Winston Churchill. About 1910 he immigrated to Canada and when war broke out he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He spoke several languages and served as an interpreter in France during World War I.



Above: Cyril Mervyn Clarke. From Wagon Trails Grown Over, Sexsmith to the Smoky Historical Society (1980), p. 993.

After the war, Mr. Clarke took a Soldier’s Settlement Grant in the Teepee Creek area. He soon discovered that farming made his asthma much worse and began concentrating on growing vegetables and flowers instead. As a black, highly educated, lifelong bachelor, and non-farmer, he was not the norm at Teepee Creek.

Cyril soon began specializing in peonies, about which he was passionate. The conservative estimate is that Mr. Clarke tested about 2000 cultivars over his thirty years of collecting. He was a regular contributor to the American Peony Society bulletin and a leading authority on peony hybrids.

As he aged, Mr. Clarke began to lose his sight and his gardening friends persuaded him to move closer to Grande Prairie. They packed up his peonies and sent them to various homes. Large collections went to the Beaverlodge Research Station and the Devonian Botanic Garden near Edmonton and his records and 921 specimens were donated to the Department of Horticulture at the University of Alberta. The university grounds are still beautified with Clarke’s peonies.

Mr. Clarke himself was given a home on Dr. Gurth O’Brien’s land, where he had a garden spot of good, well-cultivated soil beside O’Brien Lake. Mr. Clarke passed away at his home in December 1952, at the age of 70 years.



Right: Peony border at the Beaverlodge Research Station, 1956 (SPRA 383.01.07.012)

## 6 - Norman William Erskine (21-09)

Norman William Erskine was born in 1913, the son of Helen and William Erskine.

Helen and her two children came to the Flying Shot Lake area to stay with her brother Paul Ashmead in 1916. Her husband William was away serving in World War I. William did not return, he was killed at Vimy Ridge the following year. Helen, a young widow with two children, filed on a homestead located near Dimsdale and married Duncan Bain. The family, including Norman and his four siblings, moved to the Millarston District in 1925.

In the 1930s Norman attended the Vermilion School of Agriculture and later married Netta Stephen, who was also from the Millarston area. In 1940, Norman, along with a growing number of Grande Prairie boys, joined the war effort. His attestation papers list him as 5'11" weighing 135 lbs with dark brown hair, blue eyes. A rare entry was made under abnormalities - Norman appeared to have "much wax in [his] ears"! The papers also stated that Norman was living in Dimsdale, and that his occupation was a miner working for the Tisasington Coal Mine. It is also noted that he had a son born in Grande Prairie on December 2, 1941. Norman was a Gunner in the Royal Canadian Artillery and was 27 years old when he died of appendicitis in 1941 at a military hospital in Halifax. He probably did not even get a chance to see his newborn son.

He is buried beside Dennis Norman Erskine, two years old, who was perhaps the son mentioned. His wife Netta is also buried here.

Norman's mother married again and some of you may know her as Helen Shand. She lost a husband in World War I and a son in World War II.

*Source: Across the Wapiti; service file for William Robert Erskine at LAC; DHT death announcement August 14, 1941; ancestry.ca WWII Service Files of War Dead*



*Above: Forbes Presbyterian Church, ca. 1933. (SPRA 284.03.04)*

*Left: Troops standing in formation in front of the row of "H" huts, ca. 1941, at the Grande Prairie Army Training Center. (SPRA 2001.44.43)*



## 7 - James & Gerald Patterson (17-67)

James Patterson was one of the many parents whose child signed up for the war. The family was living in the Bear Lake area when Gerald Patterson signed up in September 1915. The newspaper report after the recruitment held at Lake Saskatoon reads -

*The boys, according to Col. McKinery, will all be placed in one company and they are all looking forward to the time when they can show their patriotism and loyalty to the Empire and to the district in which they have suffered the hardships of pioneer life. A reception, supper, and dance was given at Lake Saskatoon in honour of the recruits. The boys desire to express their thanks for the good times and supper which everyone so completely enjoyed.*

The August 1916 newspaper includes the following news -

*A telegram received last week by James Patterson of Bear Lake states that his son, Gerald Patterson who enlisted here last winter in the 66th, was killed in action July 15.*

*Gerald Patterson was known and respected everywhere throughout Grande Prairie, and was accounted one of the pioneers in this district, having taken up land at Bear Lake with his father and brother, Fred Patterson, nearly five years ago. The deceased is an Ontario boy, born at Stratford, where he resided until he came west in 1910. He enlisted December 23 and previous to his death had been in the trenches only a few weeks.*

Gerald died at the age of 23 years in the Battle of Mont Sorrel and is buried at the Railway Dugouts Burial Ground Cemetery in Belgium.

*Source: Gerald Patterson #101349 WWI attestation paper, Grande Prairie newspaper October 5, 1915, Canadian Virtual War Memorial*

*Right: Group photo of approximately 45 men enlisting for WWI from the Lake Saskatoon area, 1914 (SPRA 2001.01.155)*





## 8 - Gabriel Basly (13-14)

Gabriel (Gaby) Basly was born on March 28, 1885 in France on the Northern edge of Paris. He was the seventh child of Jules and Amelie Basly. His father was shop foreman in an artisan type workshop. Gaby's mother had been a widow when she married Jules.

When he was 15 Gaby was apprenticed as an electrician to the Railway Company of the West at Champs de Mars, a rail station in Paris, south of the Eiffel tower.

At the time, young men in France were required to serve in the army for three years, so at the age of 21, Gaby enlisted in the infantry at Caen, where he was living with an older brother who was his guardian as both his parents had died. When he immigrated to Canada in 1907 with his step-sister Blanche and her family, he notified the French Government about his move and inquired about his army status. Gaby and Blanche's family, the Piverts, took out homesteads in Big Valley, Alberta.

In August 1914, Gaby was informed by the French Consulate that he should report for mobilization with his army corps, so with several other young men from Big Valley who were also French, he made his way back to France to "save the motherland." He fought in the battle of Lorraine, which was a disaster for the French. During the next year his regiment lost so many of its soldiers that it was dissolved and Gaby was moved to another just in time to fight in the Battle of Verdun, where he served as a message carrier.

It was in the Battle of Verdun that Gaby earned his award for bravery. The citation reads that Gabriel "... has assured communications with the company, with the greatest disdain for danger under a bombardment of the most violent kind during attacks [in June 1916]."

Again because of heavy losses, Gaby was transferred to another regiment and in April 1917 he was granted permission to travel back to Canada on a three week leave.



Above: Gabriel Basly in his soft-top car, ca. 1925. (SPRA 164.01.02)



Above: Gabriel Basly and comrades at Martincourt having dinner in the trenches, ca. 1914. (SPRA 164.02.17)

Gaby never went back. His relatives and friends from Big Valley, who had also returned to France at the outbreak of the war, had all decided that they would be fools to return. They had given three years of their lives and lost many good friends and former neighbours from Big Valley. Gaby settled back into farming and in 1926 headed to Grande Prairie with the Pivert brothers to start a new life.

Gaby died on May 4, 1966 at the age of 80.

## 9 - John William "Jack" Thorpe (06-27)



Above: Official portrait of Jack Thorpe in his Navy uniform. Jack Thorpe enlisted in the Royal Canadian Navy Veterans Reserve when he turned 18, at the end of 1941. (SPRA 264.01)

But on occasion they'd pop off a couple of depth charges and haul in the fresh fish killed or stunned by the explosions.

Jack, who spent forty-four years with NAR/CN (railway), was twice president of the Grande Prairie Legion.

Jack died on Remembrance Day 2008 at 86.

Sources: SPRA finding aid (264); Daily Herald Tribune November 14, 2008 and December 10, 2011

Right: Jack Thorpe and three seamen under the Blue Ensign, the flag of the Royal Canadian Navy, 1942 (SPRA 264.07)

Jack Thorpe, a resident of Sexsmith, enlisted in the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve when he turned 18, near the end of 1941. He completed Basic Training on a drydocked ship in Edmonton, then went on to Vancouver Island for further training, and finally to Halifax for Radar Training. He served aboard HMCS Bayfield, a minesweeper which patrolled the east coast from Boston to Halifax; HMCS Orangeville, in the North Atlantic; and HMCS Atholl, on convoy duty from St. John's to Londonderry, Ireland.

Jack told the Daily Herald Tribune in an interview done in 2005 that he chose the Navy because he "didn't fancy walking."

He first served on a minesweeper but was posted to a corvette in 1943 for the Newfie-to-Derry convoy run across the North Atlantic. He made about twenty-four round trips.

He recalled the horrid shipboard conditions: the seasickness, the constant wet, the mouldy food. "The bread was no good, then the beef ran out and it would be nothing but kippers - ugh!"





## 10 - Edith Louise Hibbs Fredette (02-29)

Edith Louise Hibbs was born on November 14, 1889 in Montreal. She was a nurse living in London when she signed up for military service in September of 1915. Her World War I attestation paper describes her as having fair hair and blue eyes.

Edith served with the Canadian Army Medical Corps and was soon sent to Malta, where the conditions coupled with the climate took a toll on soldiers and medical staff alike. Edith was no exception. She contracted malaria in November of 1916 and is noted as being sick with it at least four more times. She was discharged from service after her last bout with it in 1917. Edith was then invalided back to England where she continued to work in the hospitals for the duration of the war.

In April of 1919 Edith was awarded the Royal Red Cross – an honour that was awarded for exceptional services in military nursing.

Edith came to the Peace Country upon a request made to her by Dr. Lewis J. O'Brien, whom she had met during her military service. Dr. O'Brien offered Edith the job of matron of the Katherine Prittie Hospital in Grande Prairie. Edith agreed and left her job at Summerland, B.C. Conditions were primitive at the log pioneer hospital that had no running water or power and a telephone that shut off at midnight. In 1929 a new hospital was built with a larger capacity, improved facilities, and modern equipment. Edith continued in her old position, becoming the first matron of the new hospital.

In 1929, Edith married the local veterinarian Dr. Louis Fredette and gave up her position as matron. Louis died in 1960 and Edith in 1964.



*Source: Edith Hibbs WWI Service File; Pioneers of the Peace; Grande Prairie, Capitol of the Peace*

*Left: The new Grande Prairie Municipal Hospital, shortly after completion in 1929. (SPRA 1997.13.04)*



*Above: Dr. L. Fredette, T.W. Lawlor, and Mrs. Lawlor picnicking on the banks of a river, June 11, 1931. (SPRA 2000.30.03)*

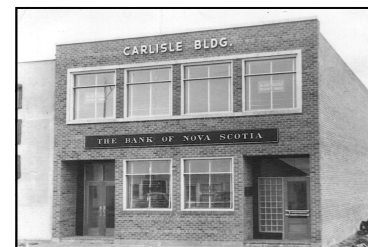
## 11 - Andrew Murray Carlisle (02-42)

Dr. Andrew Murray Carlisle was born in Peterborough, Ontario on March 6, 1896. He began medical training in 1913 but his studies were interrupted by the war. Murray enlisted while in his second year in 1915 and became a stretcher bearer in the Second Division Canadian Army. While there he attained the rank of sergeant in the Canadian Army Medical Corps and served in Canada, England, and France. After being discharged in 1918, Murray returned to complete his medical training. In 1921 Murray received a telegram from his brother-in-law Jack Archer in Lake Saskatoon, urgently requesting him to come north since the present doctor had left. Dr. Carlisle arrived by train with \$10 in his pocket and patients waiting. His brother David, who lived on the shores of Saskatoon Lake, mortgaged his farm and lent Murray the money to buy a new 1921 Model T Ford.

In the summer of 1921, Murray met Jean McFarlane, daughter of James McFarlane. James came to the Peace Country in 1910 to work with his brother Walter and his survey crew. Jean and Murray married in 1923.

The doctor's office was in their home and Jean wore many hats, serving as a nursing assistant and meal provider for out of town patients who had traveled far. The Carlisles briefly left the area when Murray was accepted to an internship at the Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto. They returned to Wembley in 1926, which is where their three children, Jim, Mary Jean, and David, were born.

As Dr. Carlisle had to travel to Grande Prairie nearly every



*Above: The Carlisle Building on the north side of Richmond Avenue, ca. 1945. The doctor's office was on the top floor. (SPRA 2002.29.01)*

day, the family eventually moved and built a new two-story home across from Montrose School, which the children attended. Dr. Carlisle continued to practice in Grande Prairie for the next twenty-one years. Jean also participated in the community in many ways, including serving on the Grande Prairie School Board for seventeen years. In 1957, the Carlisles retired to Victoria. Their children also moved away from Grande Prairie. Dr. Carlisle died in 1981 and Jean in 1986

*Sources: SPRA finding aid (399), SPRA Carlisle Family Display, Andrew Carlisle WWI records at LAC*

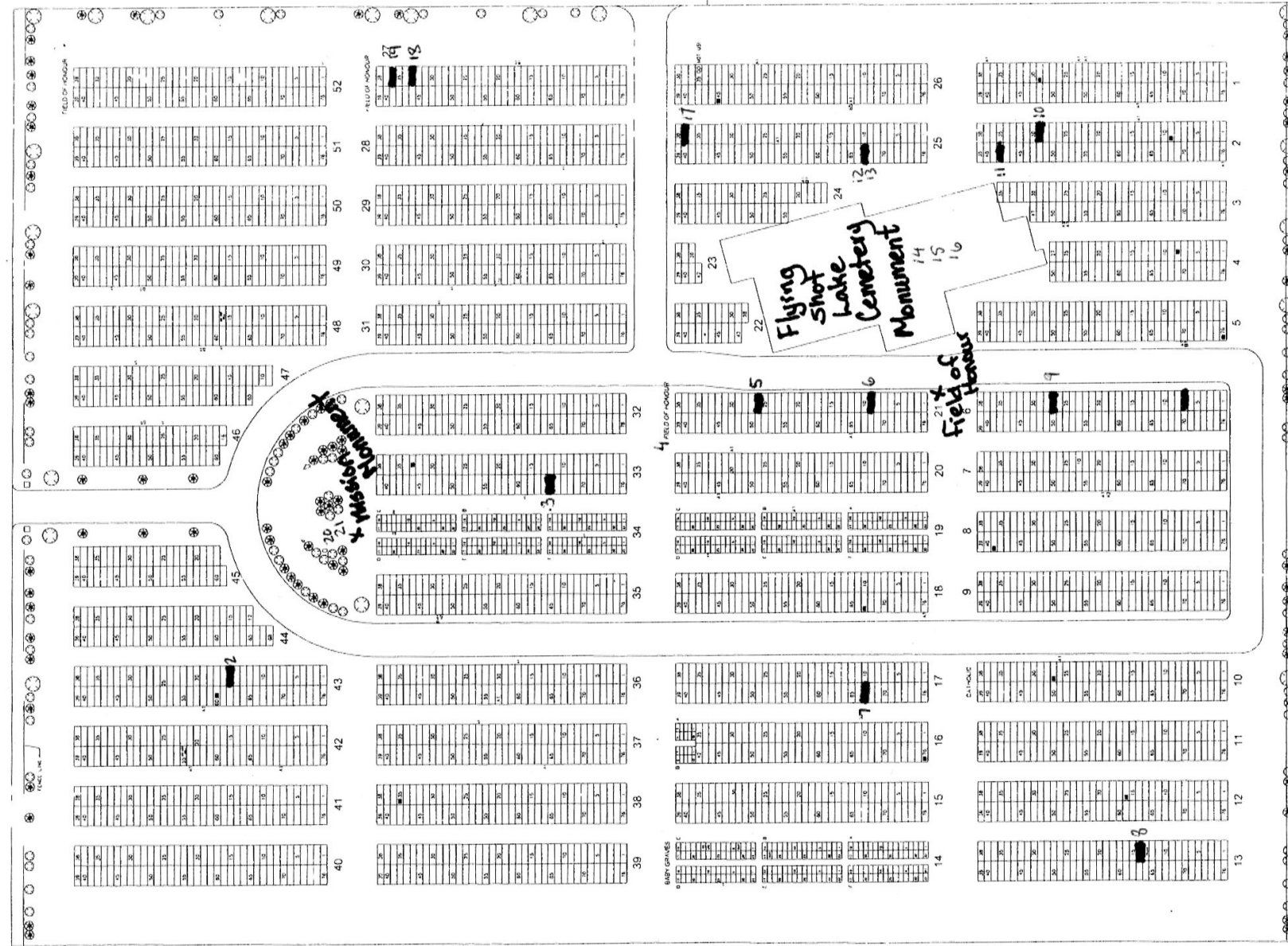


*Above: Jean Carlisle with children Mary Jean, David, and Jim on the steps of their Grande Prairie home, 1936. (SPRA 399.01.04)*

*Below: Mrs. Pratt and Dr. Carlisle playing chess at a Wapiti River picnic, 1942. (SPRA 399.01.53)*



84 AVENUE



## Cemetery Tour Stops

1. William & Ralph Witherly
2. Arnold Dryer (43-15)
3. Bob, Bert, & Bill Bessent (33-65)
4. Field of Honour/Veterans (at Row 21)
5. Cyril Mervyn Clarke (21-26)
6. Norman William Erskine (21-09)
7. James & Gerald Patterson (17-67)
8. Gabriel Basly (13-14)
9. Jack Thorpe (06-27)
10. Edith Louise Hibbs Fredette (02-29)
11. Andrew Murray Carlisle (02-42)
12. Thomas Wilson Lawlor (25-67)
13. Enid Lawlor (25-67)
14. Old Cemetery (at Flying Shot Lake Cemetery Monument)
15. Gordon Belcourt (at Flying Shot Lake Cemetery Monument)
16. Flu Graves (at Flying Shot Lake Cemetery Monument)
17. Francine De Groot (25-37)
18. Peter Campbell (27-33) & Walter Emerson Eaton
19. Edward "Scottie" Walter Almontis (27-36)
20. 1918 Murders (at Mission Monument)
21. Mission Cemetery (at Mission Monument)



## 12 - Thomas Wilson Lawlor (25-67)

Thomas Wilson Lawlor was born in 1890 in Killarney, Manitoba. He attended the University of Manitoba, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and then studied law at the University of Alberta. In March of 1916 his studies were interrupted by his decision to sign up for the war. Thomas joined the 196th University Battalion and served with the Canadian Machine Gun Corps in France and later the Royal Air Force in Egypt.

Returning to Edmonton after the war, he completed his law degree in 1920, was admitted to the bar, and set up the first law practice in Spirit River. The following year, T.W. Lawlor married Sarah McCrimmon, R.N. She had been born in Calgary in 1902 and moved to Edmonton with her parents, where she graduated from the Royal Alexandra Hospital as a nurse in 1919.

The family moved to Grande Prairie in 1924 and Lawlor set up a law practice with J.H. Sissons.

Mr. Lawlor was very community minded – he was a part of at least eight different community groups and became Mayor of Grande Prairie in 1939. World War II had an impact while he was in office. A Basic Training Base was established at the south end of town, improvements to the airport took place, and an American Army Base was also established as part of the Northwest Staging Route which ferried planes to Russia. It was also during Lawlor's term of office that the town's library became a public library.

The Lawlors had three daughters: Flora, Enid and Agnes. T.W. Lawlor died in 1959 at the age of 68. Mrs. Lawlor moved to Vernon, B.C. and is not buried here, though two of their daughters are.



Left: Grande Prairie Town Council, 1942-1943. Back, L to R: T. Blair, C. H. Graban, Robert Keys (Secretary-Treasurer), L. Kowsensky. Front, L to R: G. H. Bishop, L. C. Porteus, T. W. Lawlor (Mayor), J. O. Watson. (SPRA 460.96)



Above: T.W. Lawlor and Governor General Lord Tweedsmuir walking along the railway station boardwalk, 1939. (SPRA 2000.30.06)

## 13 - Enid Lawlor (25-67)

Enid Lawlor was born in Grande Prairie on May 13, 1927 to parents Thomas and Sarah.

She attended school in Grande Prairie and during World War II she enlisted in the Canadian Women's Army Corps, serving in Edmonton. She later attended college and graduate school at Brigham Young University and the University of Utah in the United States, where she received her master's degree in social work. When working in New York Enid became a member of the United States Army Reserve, attaining the rank of colonel.

Enid developed and directed a shelter for battered women in Detroit and it was the first one in the state of Michigan.

Enid also established the Thomas W. Lawlor Memorial Award in law which is "to be awarded annually to a student with satisfactory academic standing entering any year in the Faculty of Law whose permanent residence is in Northern Alberta in the Peace River District (including the Grande Prairie area)."

Upon retirement, Enid traveled extensively. She passed away in Scottsdale, Arizona and her ashes were brought to Grande Prairie to be buried by her father.

Sources: <http://www.ww2f.com/topic/53398-ww1s-last-victim/>

<https://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/ro.cfm?id=536>

Enid Lawlor – Thesis/dissertation written in 1955

[http://www.worldcat.org/search?q=au%3ALawlor%2C+Enid+Mae%2C&qt=hot\\_author](http://www.worldcat.org/search?q=au%3ALawlor%2C+Enid+Mae%2C&qt=hot_author)



Left: Enid is the woman in the center of the photograph. Photo found on [www.geni.com](http://www.geni.com)



14 - Old Cemetery (at Flying Shot Lake Cemetery Monument)

This is the oldest and original part of the cemetery. It is also known as the Flying Shot Lake Cemetery, as it is considered to be in the Flying Shot Lake district. Before this cemetery existed, all burials, Catholic and Protestant, were done in the Catholic mission cemetery. Although a Presbyterian church was erected almost right away, plans for a cemetery were delayed. Rev. Forbes, the Presbyterian minister, claimed that before June 1913 there was “no immediate need.” However, when a stranger died on the trail and there was no good place to bury him, the need became apparent. The Presbyterians applied to the government for a grant of land to use as a cemetery and the Department of the Interior granted their request in the spring of 1914.

Arthur Weldon Hamilton was the first person buried in the cemetery, although his grave is now unmarked. He was born in 1886 in Ontario and had come from Calgary around 1911, purchasing property and building a large feed barn. He filed on a homestead in the area in January 1912.

Mr. Hamilton was appointed poundkeeper for the village of Grande Prairie in August 1914 with the passing of the village’s first bylaw, restricting horse and cattle from running free in the village. He was killed in a barn fire on the morning of November 27, 1914. The fire also destroyed Hamilton’s livery, feed, and sales stable, of which Mr. Hamilton was the proprietor, and also killed several horses. The fire is believed to have started from a lantern used by Mr. Hamilton in his morning chores. Hamilton’s funeral took place at the Anglican Church on December 1 and he was buried here, in the “Presbyterian Cemetery at Flying Shot.”

A memorial stone has since been erected to mark this old section of the cemetery. It is on an angle to line up with the orientation of the graves. There is a diagram of the Old Cemetery on the back of the monument.

The graves in the Old Cemetery have the appearance of being hand-dug. The corners are not squared and they are only about 5 feet deep. There is some speculation that the old cemetery may have been surrounded by caragana bushes.



An aerial view of the Grande Prairie Cemetery in 1974, looking east. Some of the oldest monuments are visible in this photograph. (SPRA 190.02.01.0285.01.)

15 - Gordon Belcourt (at Flying Shot Lake Cemetery Monument)

Gordon was born in Lac St. Anne to parents Magloire and Constance Letendre. They were some of the early Metis settlers to this area.

Gordon Belcourt owned land on the outskirts of Flying Shot Lake and signed up for World War I from Lake Saskatoon on July 21, 1915.

At the time of enlistment he is listed as being 23 years old, standing 5 feet 7 inches tall. He joined the 49th Regiment and left for France. In September of 1915 he put in a request to be transferred from the 9th Reserve Battalion to the 49th, which found Gordon fighting at Mount Sorrel. Veterans Affairs Canada describes that battle in this way -

“For the 3rd Division, the initiation to battle was even more devastating. This time the Germans mounted an attack to dislodge the Allies from their positions at Mount Sorrel just south of the Ypres-Menin Road. In the fiercest bombardment yet experienced by Canadian troops, whole sections of trench were obliterated and the defending garrisons devastated. Human bodies and even the trees of Sanctuary Wood were hurled into the air by the explosions. As men were literally blown from their positions, the 3rd Division fought desperately until overwhelmed by enemy infantry. By evening the enemy advance was checked, but the important vantage points of Mount Sorrel and Hills 61 and 62 were lost. A counter-attack by the Canadians the next morning failed; and on June 6, after exploding four mines on

DESCRIPTION OF Gordon Belcourt ON ENLISTMENT.

Apparent Age 24 years 7 months.  
(To be determined according to the instructions given in the Regulations for Army Medical Services.)

Height 5 ft. 6 in.

Girth when fully expanded 35 in.

Range of expansion 3 in.

Complexion Dark

Eyes Brown

Hair Black

Distinctive marks, and marks indicating congenital peculiarities or previous disease.  
*Bear on right wrist*

Should the Medical Officer be of opinion that the recruit has served before, he will, before the date above given or any previous service, attach a slip to this effect, for the information of the Approving Officer.

Church of England \_\_\_\_\_

Presbyterian \_\_\_\_\_

Methodist \_\_\_\_\_

Baptist or Congregationalist \_\_\_\_\_

Other Protestants (Designation to be stated.) \_\_\_\_\_

Roman Catholic ☒ \_\_\_\_\_

Jewish \_\_\_\_\_

CERTIFICATE OF MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

I have examined the above-named Recruit and find that he does not present any of the causes of rejection specified in the Regulations for Army Medical Services.

He can see at the required distance with either eye; his heart and lungs are healthy; he has the free use of his joints and limbs, and he declares that he is not subject to fits of any description.

I consider him *Fit* for the Canadian Over-Sea Expeditionary Force.

Date *July 22nd* 1915 *M. B. Macdonald M.D.*

Place *Grande Prairie* *Lake Saskatoon* Medical Officer.

\*Insert here "fit" or "unfit."  
NOTE.—Should the Medical Officer consider the Recruit unfit, he will fill in the foregoing Certificate only, in the case of those who have been accepted, and will briefly state below the cause of rejection.—

CERTIFICATE OF OFFICER COMMANDING UNIT

*Gordon Belcourt* having been finally approved and inspected by me this day, and his Name, Age, Date of Attestation, and every prescribed particular having been recorded, I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.

Date *July 27* 1915 *[Signature]* (Signature of Officer.)  
Commanding 80th Reserve Bn., C.E.F.



the Canadian front, the Germans assaulted again and captured Hooze on the Menin Road.

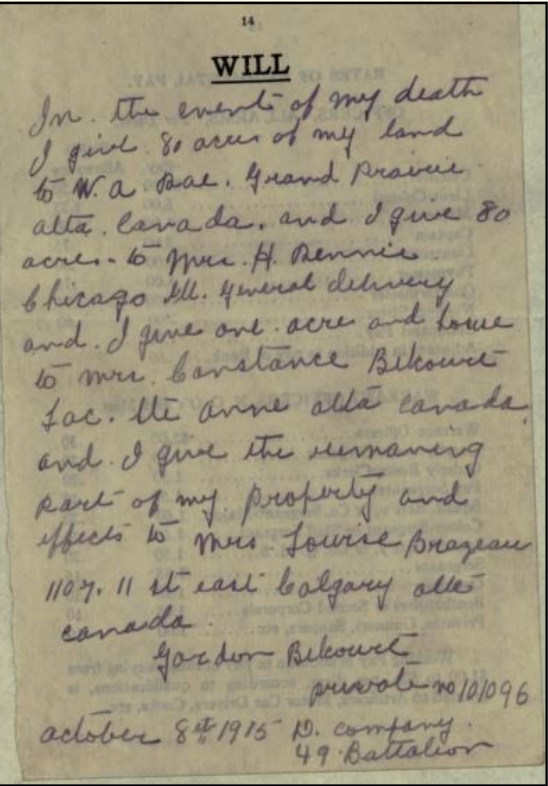
“The newly appointed Commander of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng, was determined to win back Mount Sorrel and Hill 62. He gave orders for a carefully planned attack, well supported by artillery, to be carried out by the 1st Canadian Division under the command of Major-General Currie. Preceded by a vicious bombardment, the Canadian infantry attacked on June 13 at 1:30 AM in the darkness, wind, and rain. Careful planning paid off, and the heights lost on June 2 were re-taken. The cost was high. At Mount Sorrel Canadian troops suffered 8,430 casualties, including General Mercer, who was killed by shrapnel while visiting the front line at the opening of the German assault.”

This battle was the prelude to the Somme, which began on July 1, 1916.

Gordon was wounded on his left side and his leg on June 13 at the battle described above. He was transported to the 3rd Canadian Casualty Clearing Station Hospital where he died from the wounds he received.

Gordon is buried at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery in Belgium.

Sources: WWI Service File at LAC; Find-A-Grave; Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The First Metis...A New Nation by Dr. Anne Anderson; Veterans Affairs Canada - <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/canada/canada8>



16 - Flu Graves (open area at Flying Shot Lake Cemetery Monument)

There is a large open area in the middle of the Flying Shot Lake Cemetery. This is the resting place of several victims of the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918-1919. The original wooden markers have unfortunately disintegrated and rotted away.

The Spanish flu originated not in Spain but in an American army camp in Kansas. It traveled with the troops to Europe and home again, turning into a pandemic that killed an estimated 3% of the total world population. In November 1918 alone, about three dozen local people died of the flu. The Immigration Hall was taken over by the Board of Health and used as an isolation hospital and people were required to wear a face mask; non-compliants were fined \$50. Another flu hospital was set up at Lake Saskatoon.



Above, Grande Prairie Immigration Hall, erected about 1917, at approximately east 99<sup>th</sup> Avenue at 98<sup>th</sup> Street. (SPRA 2001.01.063)

By mid-December the epidemic seemed to be over, but the relief was short-lived as a new wave arrived in January 1919.

The local undertaker, J. B. Oliver, went away to war in August 1918. Unfortunately, the man he left in charge succumbed to the flu almost immediately. Local hotel owner Frank Donald stepped in to fill the gap. Because the ground was too hard here, a new flu cemetery was opened near Bear Creek where the ground is sandy and easier to dig. This site is located on the east side of Resources Road, just outside of the city (approximately opposite the Wedgewood neighbourhood), although there are very few graves left at that location as many of the bodies were later relocated to the Flying Shot Lake Cemetery. Other



Above and right, Bear Creek Cemetery, 1982, located in the sandy dunes north of the creek. (SPRA 050.08.04.103-.104)

flu victims were buried in the Mission Cemetery and their names appear on the Mission Cemetery Monument.



17 - Francine De Groot (25-37)

The Grande Prairie Herald-Tribune marked the arrival of Dutch immigrants to Grande Prairie by writing an article about their harrowing experience:

March 24, 1949

Two Dutch Families Now Make Home Here

Believing that opportunities in Canada were better for themselves and their families, two Dutch families arrived recently in Grande Prairie from Holland. They are Mr. and Mrs. L. De Groot and daughter Jennie, Mr. and Mrs. A. Luiken and ten children. Both families are settled and happy to be here.

Mr. DeGroot always liked Canada and had planned to come here before the war. He owned a butcher shop in the city of Groningen. With the German occupation he became a leader of the underground. He was arrested by the Gestapo a few weeks before the Canadian Army of liberation marched in. During his imprisonment he was flogged daily with nail-studded straps and tortured in other ways but the Gestapo was unable to obtain any information from him. In the meantime the dreaded Gestapo had driven his wife and 14-year old daughter from their home, at the point of a gun, without outer clothing of any kind in bitterly cold weather. They even confiscated their food coupons in the hope that they would die of hunger and exposure. But they managed to get shelter with friends.

Knowing the Gestapo would arrest anyone who knocked at the door of their home, Jennie was able to warn all their friends and members of her father’s group not to go near the house. Danger meant nothing to these brave people when their beloved Holland was in danger. Fortunately the Canadians arrived in time to save Mr. DeGroot. When the family returned to their home it had been stripped of everything by the Germans.

Mr. DeGroot came to Canada last fall and is now employed at the Grande Prairie Meat Co. His wife and daughter left Rotterdam by boat in late January this year to join him here. Jennie, who was a stenographer in Holland, is learning English and typewriting on Canadian machines at St. Joseph’s Business College here. She has a position waiting for her when she completes the course.

Mr. & Mrs. Luiken came from central Holland a few weeks ago. The large family is comfortably established on the farm of Mr. Inman just west of town. The children range in age from 5 to 20 years. Five of them attend the small school at Dimsdale. The eldest son works in a lumber camp. All are learning English as fast as they can to be able to take their place in the home of their adoption.

The size and variety of scenery in Canada was a revelation to all of them as Holland is small by comparison and is mostly flat and at sea level.

Here lies Francine DeGroot who died in Grande Prairie at the age of 57 in 1960. We don’t know what happened to Louis, her husband, or their daughter Jennie, but they appear to have left Grande Prairie about 1961.

The Luiken family is thought to have eventually moved to the Fairview area.

Source: The Herald Tribune March 24, 1949; Grande Prairie City Directories

18 - Peter Campbell (27-33) & Walter Emerson Eaton

Peter Campbell was born in Spirit River to Julianne Gauthier & Alexis Campbell. The Campbell family were the first Metis settlers in this area, and their home was located where Southview IGA sits. Peter’s mother was French-Cree Metis and his father was Iroquois-Cree Metis and they had seventeen children. Peter attended the first school in Grande Prairie taught by I.V. Macklin. In the early 1920s, with the influx of returning soldiers from World War I and new immigrants, the Grande Prairie population exploded. This led to the Campbell family relocating to Kelly Lake. In 1941 Peter Campbell signed up for World War II and spent four years with the Calgary Highlanders as a guide and packer for geologists, forestry officials, and oil exploration.

Also buried here is his wife Christine Eaton who was born at Lake Saskatoon in 1912. Christine’s father Walter Emerson Eaton enlisted in the 66th Battalion in 1915. A letter he wrote home was printed in the newspaper:

Dear Friend:

Sitting today in our little dugout and most of the boys have got tired of talking politics of Lord George, Cabinet, and War. My thoughts fly back to dear old Canada and wonder what you are all doing in that little spot called Grande Prairie. I heard the other day that I was reported killed, but am very glad to be able to write and say it is a mistake and am very much alive and in good health, hoping you all are the same. I expect if I should get off the train at Grande Prairie City some day in the future, I would have quite a time finding the old trails around there... he writes further ... there will not be near as many [men] come back as left ... they went through what seemed [the] impossible time after time and believe me they took a toll...

His letter goes on to inquire after local people.

William Emmerson Eaton received the Military Medal for bravery and was promoted to Sergeant days before he was killed in action on November 4, 1917 at Ypres. Walter is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial in Belgium.



His daughter Christine was a widow with three children when she married Peter Campbell at Lake

Left: Lake Saskatoon Main Street, ca. 1911 (SPRA 116.09.01.01.798)



<h1>Walter Eaton</h1> <h2>Says He is Not Dead Yet</h2> <p>Walter Eaton is very much alive. The report that he was killed in action reached the Prairie several weeks ago. The many friends of Mr. Eaton had no reason to doubt the story of his death although no official confirmation had come. Exactly from what source the news started will never be known, it being one of those unexplainable occurrences that brings so many unnecessary heart-aches and grief to the family and friends of the person in question. Walter Eaton was one of the</p>	<p>old-time settlers of Grande Prairie, residing near Lake Saskatoon for many years. Mr. Eaton was a sports enthusiast, taking a great interest in baseball and hockey. He enlisted with others in the 66th Battalion and has since seen active service in France.</p> <p>Dear Friend:---</p> <p>Sitting today in our little dug-out, and most of the boys have got tired of talking politics of Lord George, Cabinet and War. My thoughts fly back to dear old Canada and wonder what you are all doing in that little spot on the map called Grande Prairie. I heard the other day that I was reported killed, but am very glad to be able to write and say it is a mistake and am very much alive and in good health, hoping you are all</p>	<p>the same. I expect if I should get off the train at Grande Prairie city some day in the future, I would have quite a time finding the old trails around there. Well, William, the best of luck! I hope it will take me two days to get acquainted when I come back, am sorry, but there will not be near as many come back as left in that merry bunch. Oh! but they were men! They went through what seemed impossible time after time and believe me they took a toll. I cannot tell you any news, but you can see what the Canadians are doing in the papers. How is Malcolm Campbell; give him my regards also all the rest of the boys. It snowed here a little last night for the first time this winter. How is the fur this winter. I hope the hunters will do well. You might tell Mr. Anderson that I won't be able</p>
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Hark, in the dark, my vision appears  
Behold, though she's old, her face wet with tears  
I gazed, there amazed, for it was no other,  
I sighed, then cried, my darling, my Mother.

Clipping: Grande Prairie Herald, November 29, 1917



**THE MASTER KEY**  
by JOHN PENNING WILSON  
A Thrilling Story of  
Mystery and Romance

**Fourth Episode, Mon., Jan.**

## 20 - 1918 Murders (at Mission Monument)

There are several names on the marker for the mission cemetery with the same death date: Frank Parzychowski, Ignace Paton, John Wuwand, and Charles Zimmer. These men are four of six murder victims killed on June 18 and 19, 1918. This is still the biggest unsolved mass murder in Alberta's history. In June 1918 the First World War was still in progress, drawing many members of the North West Mounted Police overseas and leaving the Alberta Provincial Police to keep law and order at home.

The first signal of trouble occurred the night of June 19 when Joseph Snyder and his nephew Stanley were murdered. Dan Lough, a neighbour of the two men, was the first on the scene and he quickly alerted APP Constable Allen. An Inspector McDonnell was brought in from Peace River to head the investigation, but it was soon concluded that the deaths were a murder-suicide. Joseph and Stanley Snyder are buried in plot 54 of the old Flying Shot Lake cemetery.



Above newspaper headline from the June 25, 1918 Grande Prairie Herald.

About a week later, on the farm of Ignace Paton, approximately two miles from the Snyder farm, neighbour Alex Peebles discovered three bodies. He immediately informed the police. Another body was subsequently found when they arrived at the scene. The dead men were Ignace Paton, Charles Zimmer, John Wuwand, and Frank Parzychowski. The Snyder murder-suicide conclusion was dismissed and new inquiries pursued. Paton, Wuwand, and Zimmer had been planning a trip to Fort Vermilion and had been known to be carrying large amounts of cash, which may have provided a motive for murder.

Accusations flew in many directions and a reward was posted, but by July the police were still making inquiries. Comments from the community on Provincial Police incompetence led to the assignment of NWMP special constable J. D. Nicholson. Still, the case dragged on. Matters weren't helped by the fact that the Spanish flu outbreak in the fall of 1918 killed one officer and several important witnesses. Finally, on June 22, 1920, more than two years after the murders, Dan Lough was arrested and charged with all six killings. The case, which was based on circumstantial evidence, went to trial in December, but Dan Lough was acquitted. His lawyer suggested that Joseph Snyder killed all five of the other men, then committed suicide himself.

Two months later, Richard Knechtel, another local farmer and the man who had married the widow of Frank Parzychowski less than two months after the murders, was arrested and again charged with all six killings. His principal accuser was none other than Dan Lough. However, Knechtel's case did not even go to trial and the 1918 murders lapsed into the realm of cold cases. The case has been worked on retrospectively by a number of amateurs in the years since 1918, with varied conclusions, but as of yet, the case remains unsolved.

## 21 - Mission Cemetery (at Mission Monument)

St. Vincent's Roman Catholic Mission was located on the west bank of Bear Creek, west of what became the townsite of Grande Prairie. The Mission was one of the only buildings that greeted new settlers in 1911. The mission house, which served as both residence and chapel, was originally built in 1896 on the shores of Lake Saskatoon, but in 1908 it was moved to the banks of Bear Creek. A church, the first church in the Grande Prairie District, was built in 1909. The Mission Cemetery operated from about 1909 to 1922. Around 1919 or 1920, the mission burned down and it was decided to build a church and rectory within the town of Grande Prairie.

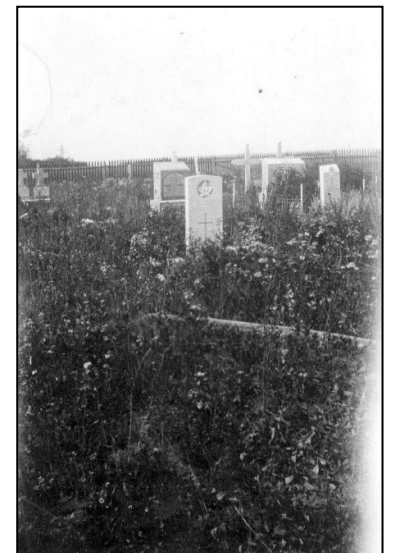
This monument was erected in 1996 and lists the names of those previously buried in the Mission Cemetery. In the early 1960s, the cemetery had to be moved due to erosion along the banks of Bear Creek, including the area occupied by the Mission Cemetery. The City approved the transfer of the graves in the Mission Cemetery in 1964 and the actual transfer was completed by the end of September 1966.



Left: A woman on horseback at Grande Prairie's Catholic Church and cemetery, ca. 1909. (SPRA 0024.01.09.01)

Below left: St. Vincent's Catholic Mission on the west side of Bear Creek, approximately ½ mile south of the road to Lake Saskatoon, ca. 1907. (SPRA 1998.08.04)

Below: Several headstones are visible at St. Vincent's Mission Cemetery, ca. 1920. (SPRA 252.01.03)



Conclusion: The Somme

“Somme. The whole history of the world cannot contain a more ghastly word.”

— Friedrich Steinbrecher, German Officer

To conclude our tour, we’ll look at one final letter written by a soldier who fought at the Somme. First, some information about this grim battle from the Veterans Affairs Canada website:

The scale of the fighting and the shocking toll it took still makes the Battle of the Somme synonymous with the horrors of the First World War for many people. The losses were truly appalling—the Allies suffered more than 650,000 casualties, including some 200,000 who had lost their lives. The Germans, who had also suffered greatly in the fighting, dubbed the Battle of the Somme “das Blutbad” (the blood bath).

Sadly, Canadian losses would contribute to this grim toll. More than 24,000 of our soldiers were killed, wounded, or went missing on the Somme. The fallen from this battle were among the more than 66,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders who lost their lives in the First World War.

The Battle of the Somme was in many ways a watershed event in the First World War. The great courage and accomplishments of Canadian soldiers there helped confirm their growing reputation as first-rate front line troops who could capture enemy positions in the face of heavy fire. Indeed, the hard lessons on battlefield tactics that the Canadian Corps learned on the Somme would prove to be very valuable in their future actions.

After the Somme, the Canadians were transferred to the sector of the Western Front near Vimy Ridge. Beginning in the spring of 1917, our soldiers would put together an unbroken string of battlefield successes that culminated in them playing a leading role in the Allied offensives in the last hundred days of the war which would finally end the conflict in November 1918.

Archibald Setter was a homesteader, first applying for land near Grouard and after abandoning that he homesteaded near Spirit River. Archie was born in Battleford, Saskatchewan and signed up for the war from Lethbridge, Alberta. A letter he wrote to William Taft was printed in the Grande Prairie newspaper. The newspaper began with this introduction:

A little over a year ago, rumor had it that Pte. Archie Setter had deserted the army. How little truth there was in the report is evidenced by the following communication:

Feb. 20, 1917

Northumberland War Hospital

Dear Friend,

I suppose you will be quite surprised to hear from me, however as I am living in my bed at the above hospital I thought I would write you a few lines. We arrived in Liverpool on the 7th May 1916 and there went to a place called St. Martain’s Plains and from there I was drafted in to the 8th Bttn and went to France in June. I was in the battle of Ypres in June and also was at the Somme when I got hit in the left ankle, and I have finally lost my left foot it is cut off about 5 inches above the ankle, so my chances are pretty good for getting back to Canada once more. Well Bill, you people have no idea of the war, but I can tell you

that it is simply hell.

His letter continues to say:

...I suppose Grande Prairie is a big place now since the railroad is there....

Dean Hodgins was in the same Bttn as me, I wrote to him a few times since I got wounded, but I have got no answer so I don’t know what has happened to him.

My leg is not quite healed yet but I am improving greatly. I think it will be some time yet before I will be able to use an artificial limb...

I remain your friend,  
Pte. A. Setter  
No. 101051 No. 5 Ward, 8th Canadians

It was later reported in the Grande Prairie paper that Archibald came back to Canada and was working as a postmaster in Saskatchewan.

As for Dean Hodgins, whom Archie mentioned in his letter, he didn’t make out as well. Dean, along with his brother Lee, were early pioneers to the Hermit Lake area. Dean enlisted in the army in Edmonton in 1915 and was reported missing on March 6, 1916. He was declared Killed in Action in September and a memorial service was held in Grande Prairie for him in 1917. Dean is remembered on the Vimy Memorial.

The Vimy Memorial has this dedication:

TO THE VALOUR OF THEIR COUNTRYMEN IN THE GREAT WAR AND IN  
MEMORY OF THEIR SIXTY THOUSAND DEAD THIS MONUMENT IS  
RAISED BY THE PEOPLE OF CANADA

Inscribed on the ramparts of the Vimy Memorial are the names of over 11,000 Canadian soldiers who were posted as “missing, presumed dead” in France.

Sources: Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_the\\_Somme](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Somme)

Veterans Affairs Canada - [http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/fact\\_sheets/somme](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/fact_sheets/somme)

Grande Prairie Herald February 20, 1917

Canada Virtual War Memorial - <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/1569295?Samuel%20Edward%20Hodgins>





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