

Volume 14

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Issue 3

# TELLING **OUR** STORIES



## BUILDING THE SOUTH PEACE

A PUBLICATION OF THE



South Peace  
REGIONAL ARCHIVES

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*This issue was sponsored by the Grande Prairie & District Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society*



*Cover: C.T.M. Turner, building a home in Grande Prairie, ca. 1935. (SPRA 2011.44.18, fonds 478)*

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

Buildings and built heritage hold a strange space in our community. On the one hand, they are the most visible part of our community, as they are literally the floors we walk on and the roofs over our heads. On the other hand, they are easy to overlook. They become such a part of our everyday lives that they can blend into the landscape and we forget the history they contain. In this issue we wanted to put architecture front and center in “Building the South Peace.”

Putting this magazine together was a lot like putting up a building. First, we laid the foundation by exploring Indigenous influences in “Indigenous Architecture” and “A Landscape in Brick.” Then we began building up the frame by showcasing prominent buildings in our community in “The Forbes Homestead” and “Glen Leslie Church.” We had to include a few windows to the past with “Uncovering the Bezanon Family House” and “Wide Load.” Finally, we put the roof on and explored how we safeguard records in “Archives & Architecture.”

Much like any construction project, this took a full team to put together. I would like to start by thanking all of the staff and volunteers for their hard work, especially all of our guest contributors. We would also like to thank the Grande Prairie and District Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society, without whose generous support this issue would not have been possible.

Ellyn Vandekerkhove  
SPRA Executive Director

# Take Note:

## Cemetery Tours

Join us as we explore the Grande Prairie Cemetery and learn about the lives of the people who have come before. This year’s tours will feature military history, crime and punishment, and women’s history.

**June 21, 24, & 28**

**July 15, 19, & 22**

**Visit our website and follow us on Facebook for more details and to book your tour.**

## New Reading Room Hours

We will be open **by appointment only**  
Wednesday–Friday, 10:00am—4:00pm  
Saturday noon–4:00pm

To **book your appointment** contact the South Peace Regional Archives at **780-830-5105** or book online at <https://southpeacearchives.org/book-a-research-appointment/>

## 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.

# AGM Highlights

Thank you to all members of the South Peace Regional Archives Society who attended the Archives’ Annual General Meeting on Saturday, March 25!

2022 was a busy year at the South Peace Regional Archives, which is highlighted in the annual report. The archives was able to return to in person programs and events, with 743 people taking part throughout the year. We also welcomed back in person researchers, and in combination with remote research requests, supported 265 researchers.

The South Peace Regional Archives would not exist without thoughtful archival donations from members of our community. Due to our current limited space, we have had to put several large donations on hold, with the individuals or organizations involved agreeing to hold onto them until after the move. Even with these constraints we were able to accept 22 small accessions in 2022, including approximately 91.5 cm of textual records, 52 photographs and 9 albums, 2 architectural drawings, 1 yearbook, 9 scrapbooks, 8 published books, 2 VHS tapes, and 1 vinyl record.

The Archives presented the annual Beth Sheehan Award, which recognizes individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to the goals of the organization. This year, Pat Wearmouth was recognized for his contributions.

Pat has been a volunteer at the South Peace Regional Archives since 2013 and has worked nearly 150 hours. In his work as a volunteer, Pat focused on a few of his historical passions: forestry and

transportation. He wrote blog posts, magazine articles, and research guides, and helped facilitate the transfer of a large records donation from Canfor.

But Pat’s support of the Archives goes far beyond his work as a volunteer. Pat has also worked towards sharing and preserving history through his work in the Peace Country Historical Society, where he has served as President. We have worked together on many projects with the PCHS during his tenure, and Pat has always been willing to speak up for us, writing us many letters of support. Collaboration is necessary for heritage organizations to thrive in our community, and Pat has played a big part in that over the years.

We would like to thank Pat for all of his work on sharing and preserving our region’s history. His passion and dedication help make our work possible.

*Below: Duff Crerar (left) presenting Pat Wearmouth with the Beth Sheehan Award*



# Indigenous Architecture

## Traditional Features & Contemporary Design

*The following article was contributed by Josephine Sallis, our former archivist. We are pleased to feature her writing once again as a guest contributor.*

Indigenous people in what is now known as Canada have a history of diverse building and design practices which reflect their cultural, spiritual, and practical needs and align with their relational worldview. The traditional igloos, tupiqs, and tipis of the northern Inuit, Plains, and Woodland nations are constructed using precise methods developed over centuries of design and practice. These types of structures are ideally suited to their environments and make effective use of local materials. Current Indigenous architectural practices build on this strategy and on Indigenous spiritual and cultural beliefs.

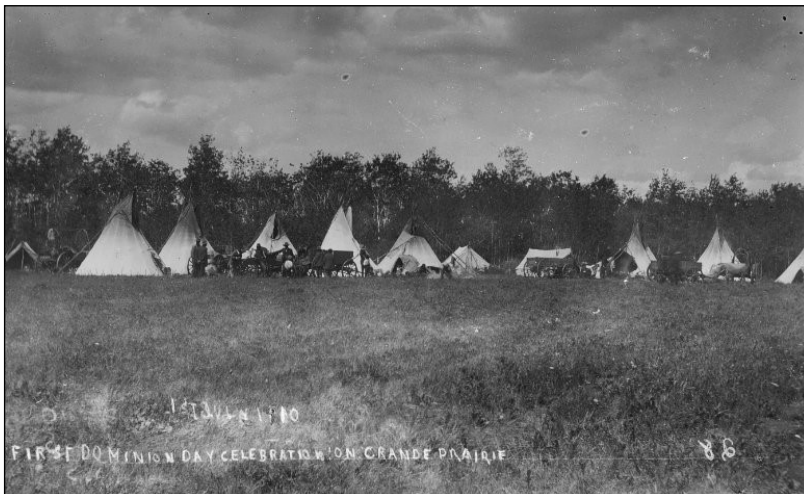
Tipis are most common in the prairie regions. Archaeologists believe tipis have been in use for about 4000 years. The archaeological evidence exists in the form

of tipi rings, a circle of rocks used to hold down the sides of the tipi. Modern tipis are erected using tent pegs and are made of heavy canvas, replacing the original buffalo hides, which became scarce as buffalo herds declined.

Tipis are not perfectly conical. Their base is somewhat egg-shaped and one side of the cone is slightly steeper than the other. The angled side and the opening are situated to provide stability in bad weather. The flexible design of tipis allows them to be modified depending on the length of available poles and size of a family group. Extra insulation and lining could be added to provide additional protection from cold. With experience, this type of housing is relatively easy to set up and take down, supporting the cyclical movement between traditional grounds for hunting and gathering. Openings to the tipi and to an encampment were generally to the east to welcome the rising sun and to be opposite the prevailing westerly winds

on the prairies. Social standing within a family or community determined placement of tipis and people inside. The floor of the tipi represents the earth, the roof the sky, and the tent poles the trails that carry their prayers from earth to sky.

*Left: Indigenous Tipis and wagons at the first Dominion Day Celebrations on the Grande Prairie, at Saskatoon Lake. Here you can see they appear to be made of canvas. 1910. (SPRA 2001.01.102)*



*Right: This image shows the organic, flowing design of Grande Prairie Regional College, now Northwestern Polytechnic. The building does not have any landscaping at this point. The building was designed by Douglas Cardinal. June 1976. Photograph by Paul Pivert. (SPRA 0190.02.01.0673.04)*

Tipis today are used largely for ceremonies and special events. However, Indigenous architects utilize and adapt modern technology and building materials to incorporate their spiritual and cultural beliefs in contemporary design. A very good example of this is Northwestern Polytechnic. The design of the Alberta-born Indigenous architect, Douglas Cardinal, Northwestern Polytechnic reflects his vision of a built environment in harmony with nature and the community.

Cardinal, Canada's first Indigenous architect, studied originally at UBC but left due to racism and moved south to Texas, eventually studying at the University of Texas in Austin. Part of his vision for the building included moving the campus from the original approved site to the location where it now stands. You can see by the image on this page that the structure is an organic design with no straight lines. Traditional Western European design practices were not sophisticated enough to deal with the complexities involved. Luckily, early in his career Cardinal utilized computers to help him plot out and demonstrate the feasibility of his culturally influenced designs. This was groundbreaking work at the time, and he was one of the first architects in Canada to use this technology for architectural design.

Cardinal's advancement of Indigenous spiritual and cultural beliefs within design is work that continues to this day, both by him and other Indigenous architects. Kelly Edzerza-Bapty, founder of Obsidian Architecture, uses a community led approach to design that utilizes public consultation of community members. They also



sit with the environment before creating a design. Metis architect Rachelle Lemieux, who works at Verne Reimer Architecture in Winnipeg, is guided by ideas of community caring and sharing.

Wanda Dalla Costa is Canada's first female Indigenous architect. She is a professor at Arizona State University, teaching Indigenous planning, architecture, and construction. In the documentary *From Earth to Sky*, Costa explains that Indigenous cultures have a "relational worldview where we believe we are in direct relationship with nature." Her company, Tawaw, is based in Arizona but over 90% of their projects are in Canada and include both private and public buildings.

Despite a long period of cultural suppression, the guiding principles of Indigenous design that supported their traditional way of life pre-contact are being regenerated and explored using both Indigenous cultural, spiritual, and design practices, and contemporary materials and technologies. Indigenous architecture is an example of the ongoing deep connections between the environment and communities, and the past, present, and future.

# Uncovering the Bezanson Family House

The following article was contributed by Shawn Morton & Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown. Shawn and Meaghan are university professors, archaeologists, and SPRA board members. We hope you enjoy their exciting contribution to Telling Our Stories.

It is no secret that documentary history of the Peace Region is dominated by white settler men. The voices and lives of women, children, and Indigenous Peoples, among others, are frequently of secondary importance or only hinted at via proxies. When these identities are explicitly addressed, it is often as context to the experiences of the white settler male and very much through his eyes. As a result, historical documentation is somewhat skewed in the recording of daily life. Yet, it is the diversity of quotidian rhythms that define human experiences. This is where archaeology can play a role.

Household archaeology can help to make those silenced voices heard and can chronicle the mundane activities of our daily lives. Unfortunately, it is rarely used as a tool for investigations at historically recent sites in our province, such as the Old Bezanson Townsite (OBT; Borden Number GgQn-2).

In Alberta, an archaeological site is "a work of humans that is of value for its

Right: Starting construction on the new Bezanson home, 1914. (SPRA 1990.30.084)

prehistoric, historic, cultural or scientific significance." Although the OBT does not include standing buildings or significant building remains, for a historic site to be considered an archaeological site, all that is required is to have a below-ground component. The OBT is an excellent candidate for archaeological research. The below-ground component remains little disturbed, and the townsite is of considerable local and regional significance.

In 2021, we started archaeological investigations at the OBT, with permissions from the provincial government and County of Grande Prairie No. 1. As readers of this magazine likely know, the OBT was a failed settler boomtown of the Peace Region, founded around 1910 by A. M. Bezanson. After mapping and testing the townsite and its known (and some unknown) archaeological features, we started our first formal excavations in 2022.



Left: A .M. Bezanson's home the first winter after it was built. The caption on the photograph reads "Our house the first winter. Building at the back is our icehouse." Ca. 1914. (SPRA 1990.30.076)

"bungalow" construction with a hip roof, (likely) clapboard or shiplap siding, and 12- and 24-pane wooden casement windows, sitting atop an earthen foundation berm. It appears to conform in proportion, scale, and style to other contemporary homesteads in the region.

We decided to begin with the town founder's house. This is the best historically documented of the townsite buildings and the subject of some recorded oral history with which we can compare and contrast the archaeological record. Our excavations focused on the SW corner of the structure, as the south and west sides were best documented photographically. This was one of the first residential structures associated with the townsite and is believed to have been constructed around 1914. It served as a residence for the settlement's "First Family" until their departure in 1917 and was subsequently converted into a post office between 1922 and 1923. The house was ultimately dismantled and moved off-site shortly following the townsite's abandonment.

Although no direct evidence of the house superstructure remains, archival photographs reveal it was constructed in at least three distinct phases. The earliest photograph (at left on facing page) shows a single-storey

Right: The corner of the Bezanson home in 1915. (SPRA 1990.30.065)

Another photograph (above), showing the house from the northeast, documents a second phase of construction, with an enclosed porch added to the east-facing doorway by the first winter.

Finally, we have a photograph (below) believed to show the house from the west looking down its south side, which documents the addition of an expansive veranda by 1915. This addition seems to have changed the roofline on at least two sides of the house: the combination roof transitions to a more gradual pitch above the veranda. If we have interpret-





Above: Topographic map of archaeological features at the Bezanson Family house. Contributed by Shawn Morton & Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown.

ed the orientation of the photograph correctly (with the help of additional photographic evidence), the veranda extended along the southern side of the structure and partially along the western side. As far as we know, it was not present along the eastern and northern sides. The veranda was supported by the placement of large boulders.

Through our mapping and excavations at the house, we documented a square (~10 m x 10 m) foundation berm made of earth and lined on its interior with

squared logs, boulder veranda supports, and an adjacent “ditch” that possibly served drainage purposes. This latter feature was also the eventual resting place for many a discarded or lost belonging, including a 1910 silver five-cent piece.

As noted in the introduction, historical archaeology is about more than confirming the details of the historical or archival record. It is also an opportunity to introduce new voices to our understanding of the past. Stone tools recovered in the sediment below the house document pre-settler Indigenous presence at the site and drive home the deep histories at play, which are absent in standard narratives of the OBT.



Left: Close ups on sections of the foundation berm showing squared log interior (south side) and ornamental stonework exterior (east side). Contributed by Shawn Morton & Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown.

Lois Bezanson adding this somewhat delicate detail.

What stories will we uncover next?

**Reference:**  
 Government of Alberta (2023). *Archaeological Sites in Alberta*. <http://www.alberta.ca/archaeological-sites-alberta.aspx>

We would like to thank our colleague Wanda Zenner for her ongoing efforts in gathering the documentary and oral histories of the Old Bezanson Townsite.

Belongings, such as a child’s cast-iron fireman’s toy, which we recovered in excavations off the SE corner of the veranda, remind us that communities comprise many diverse people. Frank and Jim Bezanson were the only children known to have lived in the house. Perhaps the toy belonged to them? As if by kismet, the image of the house with the veranda shows two children playing off its SW corner. Finally, we uncovered a row of what appears to be ornamental stonework/river cobbles along the eastern side of the foundation berm; one might picture



Right: Ancient and not-so-ancient belongings recovered from the house site. Contributed by Shawn Morton & Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown.

# Archives & Architecture

## This Issue's Archiveology

Researchers looking for architecture in the archives usually find it in the vault. The South Peace Regional Archives preserves a few collections that contain blueprints, construction documents, and other records that describe architectural projects in the region. However, architecture can also be found in the archival building itself and its unique aspects of design made to facilitate research.

The design of buildings as a way to facilitate certain activities or behaviours is an idea popularized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has endured into the 21<sup>st</sup>. The strongest expression of the concept is referred to as architectural determinism, or the belief that the built environment is the primary driver of social behaviour. Few modern architects fully support architectural determinism and critics argue that the concept implies a lack of individual free will (Evans 2015, 200). However, the idea of architecture being able to facilitate certain behaviours has remained popular and can be found in a variety of projects, from major housing initiatives to elements of hostile design like slanted benches or spikes intended to prevent loitering.



The impact of architecture on behaviour can be most seen in buildings that have failed to encourage social cohesion. The Pruitt-Igoe housing complex, built in St. Louis, Missouri in the 1950s, was intended to be a modernist example of high density communities, but instead became infamous for crime and social dysfunction. Many architects later argued that the long, open distances between apartments and isolation from the rest of the community discouraged communal activities and fostered social alienation. Interviewed by BBC about growing up in the Pruitt-Igoe complex, artist Tinie Tempah described that it felt like they had been “designed for you not to succeed” (Michael Bond 2017).

Little has been written about how architecture can impact researchers navigating an archives. More has been discussed in the context of libraries, where considerations for design have grown as libraries transition from book repositories to centres for communal gatherings and support. Many major library branches have undergone renovations to create spaces that facilitate this broader set of goals. In 2020, the Stanley Milner library in Edmonton finally opened their doors after an extended renovation. Visitors to the space were invited to see the new facilities built into the library, including expanded makerspaces and communal rooms accessible to all community members. In a news release the CEO of the EPL, Pilar Martinez, stated their hope that the new spaces would “quickly become the vibrant community hub in our city we have always imagined” (CBC News 2020).

*Left: Stanley Milner Library, CBC, 2020*



While much of the discussion around architecture and social behavior in library settings and beyond focuses on the functional design of a building or space, it is also important to consider the symbolism baked into architecture. Reflecting on his experience of using the New Zealand National Library Archives, researcher Tony Ballantyne argues that the visual language of an archival reading room conveys information to a visitor that impacts what sort of research they conduct, depending on their perspective (Evans 2015, 201). Architectural symbolism can sometimes present a different message to different people; a traditional archival reading room may make the impression of an official and stately institution to some, but could feel oppressive and colonial to others. Both the practical design and the symbolism of a building can impact whether someone feels comfortable in a space.

As the staff here at the SPRA have been preparing for the renovation of the new archival space in Centre 2000, a lot of thought has gone into how we can design a space welcoming for all visitors. We have grown so much since opening that our current location is quite cramped, but the new space will be large enough to meet our current needs. With a planned

shift towards furniture with wheels, we intend to take a more modular approach to designing the space so we can reshape it to meet the archives' changing needs. Another welcome addition in Centre 2000 will be the large windows and access to the patio in the reading room. Since it is the space researchers and volunteers will use most frequently, we are excited for warm sunlight in the reading room, especially in the winter. The patio access also presents an opportunity for more diverse summertime programming opportunities at the archives.

The biggest design change in the new space is the planned quiet room adjoining the reading room. Trauma and emotion is not often discussed in relation to archives, but it is something that staff need to be prepared for when assisting researchers and volunteers. Historical records can sometimes involve deeply personal subjects and events, which can prompt an emotional response in someone viewing them. Rather than preventing access to those records, we can instead provide tools to help support researchers and volunteers. A quiet room is one of those tools and can provide a private, quiet space for someone dealing with an emotional response. By building these sorts of tools into the architecture of the space, we hope that the new archives will be welcoming to everyone and better support community engagement with local history.

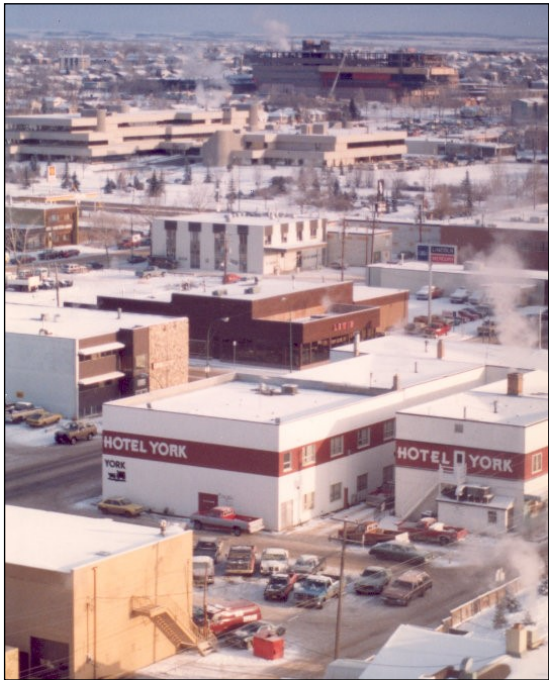
Evans, Madelin. 2015. “Developing a research methodology to explore whether the architecture and environment of reading rooms has an effect on readers' behaviour, and specifically handling.” *Archives & Records* 36 (2): 195-215. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2015.10707136> 2 195 215

Bond, Michael. 2017. “The hidden ways that architecture affects how you feel.” BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170605-the-psychology-behind-your-citys-design>

CBC News. “Peek inside Edmonton's 'revitalized' downtown library.” CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/edmonton-public-library-reopening-1.5724880>

# Under Construction

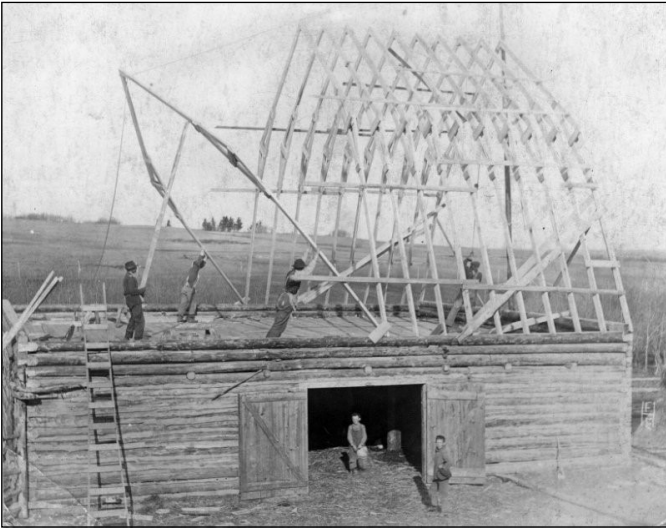
The built environment of Grande Prairie and the surrounding communities has changed dramatically, even in just the past few years. Enjoy these photographs of local buildings—some of which may be familiar.



Above: View from the top floor of 214 Place, 1983. (SPRA 002.05.03.060)

Top right: A barn raising on Herbert Van Schaick's farm. Herbert, Bill Sharp, and Joe Jensen are seen on top and Foster and Clifton Van Schaick are seen in the doorway. Ca. 1917. (SPRA 344.02.44)

Center right: Building the parsonage at Emmaus Lutheran Church in the North Kleskun district east of Sexsmith. William Steinke, Tom Steinke, and Fred Weis. Ca. 1930. (SPRA 266.17)



Left: Log house under construction, 1920. (SPRA 2001.01.085)

Below left: An elevator located behind the Hythe railway station under construction, ca. 1947. (SPRA 573.02.07)

Below right: Construction of the Grande Prairie School, July 31, 1917. It was built on land donated by Reverend Forbes and named Montrose after Mrs. Forbes' birth place in Scotland. (SPRA 024.01.08.04)



Bottom left (facing page): Bonnie Carlisle (wife of Murray's brother Dave) and David Carlisle sitting on the front step of an ivy covered house. The caption under the photograph reads "The House of the Three Bears." 1943. (SPRA 399.13.15)

Right: Three men, a woman, and a child are standing near the Bad Heart Roman Catholic Church in 1954. This was before stucco was put over the bales of straw in the walls of the church. (SPRA 002.04.06.51)



# The Forbes Homestead

## Home, Hospital, & Historic Site

*This article was contributed by Taci Trudeau. Taci worked as an Archives Assistant (Student) at the South Peace Regional Archives during the summer of 2022. She had worked as an interpreter at the Forbes Homestead during the summer of 2021, which piqued her interest in the Forbes homestead, its history, and its inhabitants.*

When discussing architecture throughout the Peace Region, it is imperative that we dedicate some time to one of the oldest buildings still standing in Grande Prairie, the Forbes Homestead. Reverend Alexander Forbes and his wife Agnes travelled from Fort Saskatchewan to the Grande Prairie area in 1909 to survey for missionary work, and by 1910 they had volunteered to settle and become missionaries in the Peace Region. Their trip to Grande Prairie took 73 days

(about two and a half months) and was riddled with harsh weather and unforgiving elements. It is said that they set off while it was negative forty degrees and arrived while fighting off mosquitos. When they arrived, they lived in a shack on the Cliffords' homestead at Flying

*Right: Tom Paul, Agnes Forbes, and Maud Clifford (?) standing outside the building that functioned as a hospital at Flying Shot Lake. Nurse Agnes Baird is visible in the window. The caption beside the photograph reads "Hospital Flying Shot Lake." 1910. (SPRA 127.02.21)*



Shot Lake. Their shack and the caboose they had travelled in later became a makeshift hospital. By fall of 1910, Alexander Forbes had filed for a homestead. The plot stretched from what is now 100th Avenue to 108th Avenue, and from 96th Street to 100th Street, and in 1911 the construction of the first hospital in Grande Prairie began. The log hospital was approximately 24 by 20 feet of open space with a small attic for the nursing staff's living quarters. In 1912 a two-story expansion was added to the hospital as living quarters for Alexander and Agnes. It came to be known as Montrose House after Agnes's hometown of Montrose, Scotland. Many individuals described Montrose House as a warm and welcoming home; the door was always open to guests and tea was readily available. The home was often bustling with

*Right: Mount Rose house, the Grande Prairie Presbyterian Church manse and homestead house of Rev. and Mrs. Alexander Forbes. The caption below the photograph reads "1912 Mount Rose." 1912. (SPRA 127.02.12)*

activity. Besides the visitors that often stopped by to see Agnes, she also organized the Women's Home Mission Society meetings within the home. Additionally, before the Presbyterian church was constructed, many weddings were held in the Forbes' homes, officiated by Reverend Forbes. A certificate from one of the many weddings held in their home can still be found on the mantle in the parlor. Sadly, Agnes passed peacefully in her sleep in 1917. Alexander married an accomplished nurse, Christine Smith, and moved to Ontario in 1924.

It was not until 1938 that Alexander Forbes would give the land title over to Ike Nelson and his family. Ike was one of the men who travelled with the Forbeses to Grande Prairie and helped build the hospital and manse addition. The Nelson family moved into Montrose House in 1936 and resided there until 1947. During their stay there was a small farm, a two-stall barn, a chicken coop, and a woodshed; this is vastly different from what one can see around the homestead today. The Nelsons also added a bathroom on the upper floor of the home and replaced the siding with cedar. The original pioneer hospital was renovated to become a garage. Although less information is available on the later years of the Forbes homestead history up to the establishment of Montrose House as a historical site, we can see that from 1958 to 1966 it was a residence for nurses at the



Katherine Prittie hospital. It was described as being decorated with many needlepoint pieces and floral carpets. From 1966 to 1975, when the City of Grande Prairie took over the land title and declared it a historical site, John E. Barschel and his family lived in the home and carried out many of the renovations that can be seen in the home even now.

Restoration of the Forbes Homestead did not officially begin until 2007. The project was undertaken by the Grande Prairie Heritage Building Restoration Society. It was completed in 2010, but the restoration was much too expensive and only the ground floor was restored at that time. The upper floor was not fully restored until 2013 as a project of the Grande Prairie Museum. That same year the Forbes Homestead was opened for public tours, and summer tea events were held in memory of Reverend and Agnes Forbes' contributions to the Peace region. These teas are still held each summer on the lawn of the Forbes Homestead.

# Glen Leslie Church

## Restoring a Provincial Historic Resource

*An architecture-themed issue of Telling Our Stories would not be complete without talking about the importance of restoring and preserving buildings of historical significance. We are thrilled to share this guest contribution from Wanda Zenner, who was involved in the restoration of the Glen Leslie Church east of Grande Prairie.*

**Designation:** Provincial Historic Resource

**Date of Designation:** October 6, 2011

**Location:** SW 6-72-3-W6

6 km southwest of Bezanson

20 km east of Grande Prairie on Highway 670

### Heritage Value:

The heritage value of the Glen Leslie Church lies in its architectural significance as a rare example of a log church with exposed exterior walls. This type of con-



*Above: Thomas and Margaret Leslie, 1935 (Photograph courtesy of Wanda Zenner)*

struction was once common for churches and other buildings in Alberta, but existing examples of this construction technique are now rare.

Once an area east of Grande Prairie was surveyed in 1909, it soon became settled by those who were seeking land ownership by means of homestead applications. The immediate area had been settled by several members of the Leslie

*Left: Glen Leslie Presbyterian Church, 1917. (SPRA 032.08.08.0115)*



*Above: Picnic at Glen Leslie Church. Kenneth (?) Morrison at far right. Ed Leslie far left. Also Grandma Moon, Mr. Anderson, Mrs. Ross Wales, Hazel Patterson, Mrs. Kimble, Gladys Leslie, Steve Garrett. Ca. 1932. (SPRA 430.01.15)*

family and subsequently named “Glen of the Leslies”; however, the name was eventually shortened to Glen Leslie. As soon as the farmers had their homes and barns built, their attention turned to the construction of a church. Up to that point, services had been held in the home of the area’s prominent resident, Thomas Leslie, and presided over by Presbyterian minister, Reverend Alexander Forbes. In the winter of 1913, Thomas Leslie and Reverend Forbes jointly acquired ten acres of land upon which to build a church. In 1914, a meeting was held to formulate a plan for the church and it was decided that it would be constructed of logs. A local carpenter, Alf Olson, was hired to oversee the project with all other labour being donated. A local farmer donated seasoned logs that he had on hand, with the under-

*Right: Glen Leslie Church gathering. Dorothy, Tom, and Margaret Leslie are seated in the middle with children Keith, Kenneth, and Bill Leslie seated at their feet. 1938. (SPRA 430.01.42)*



standing that the community would replace them once time was available to do so. Work began the following spring as soon as the crops were seeded. A trench was dug, with stones being used as the foundation. The logs were stripped of their bark, partially squared, and laid horizontally with the corners joined by hand-cut, dove-tailed notches under the craftsmanship of Nels Meyers. The church was weatherproofed with chinking between the logs. Wood

shingles, originally pine, covered the roof and the gable ends. Entry to the church is gained through the south elevation via a five-panel door, which is flanked by double-hung windows. A row of three evenly spaced double-hung windows runs along both the east and west elevations. The window and doorway openings are accentuated with trim intended to resemble segmental arches. The interior had handcrafted pews, a raised alter, and a wood-plank floor. Although many early churches in rural Alberta were constructed of logs, these buildings were often demolished, sold, or upgraded as finances and available



*Above: Children in front of the Glen Leslie Church (also the Somme School) include three Christie girls, two Minchin boys, Charles Wales, Sarah Minchin, and Alfred Wales. Ca. 1920. (SPRA 430.01.038)*

building technology and materials improved. The church opened for its first service on October 31, 1915 with a total cost of \$468. Although the Glen Leslie Church was ostensibly a Presbyterian church, the congregation included adherents of various Protestant denominations and it eventually became a United Church. The Glen Leslie Church offered regular worship services until 1964. Since that time, it has been used occasionally for worship services and more regularly as a community centre.

While purpose-built for use as a church, the building was also used as a school from 1918 to 1928, providing instruction for the Somme School Division. In the photograph at right, note the large woodpile used during the time that the building was utilized as a school.

*Right: Glen Leslie Presbyterian Church was built in 1915. It was used as the schoolhouse for Somme School from 1918 to 1928. (SPRA 2005.069.07, fonds 281)*



Over the years, the building succumbed to the ravages of time and was at the point of collapsing. In 2011, a meeting was held at Bezanston to see if there was sufficient interest in restoring the building. A committee, the Glen Leslie Church Preservation Group, was formed and would act as a steering committee for the County of Grande Prairie. Funding was provided by donations and grants from the County of Grande Prairie and the Alberta Historical Resource Foundation. Once a contractor specializing in restoring log buildings was hired, work began in 2013. A crane removed the roof and top three rows of logs, with the remaining logs being removed manually and numbered. The floor was removed in one piece, and the old cement foundation was removed and replaced with a new foundation, complete with a centre support and vent holes. The bottom logs that were beyond repair were removed and replaced with new logs and then the remaining logs were painstakingly installed in place. The roof was then re-installed by a crane, and windows were re-glazed, repaired, and then reinstalled. The original door was repaired along with the original lock. The roof was re-shingled with cedar shingles and shakes



were replaced on the gable ends. The work was completed in 2015, just in time to hold a Centennial Celebration with over 300 people in attendance. The church was re-dedicated by Reverend Malcolm from the Forbes Presbyterian Church in Grande Prairie. Several dignitaries were present: Chris Warkentin, MP for Grande Prairie-McKenzie; Harold Bulford, County of Grande Prairie Division 1 Councillor; Gary Chen, Alberta Culture's Heritage Conservation Advisor for



the Northern Region; and Leah Miller, board member for the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation.

In 2016, the Glen Leslie Church Preservation Group received the Alberta Historic Resources Foundation's prestigious award for conservation for their work restoring the Glen Leslie Church.

#### References:

Alberta Register of Historic Places

Glen Leslie Church Centennial History Book

*All photographs on this page courtesy of Wanda Zenner.*

*Top left: A crane removes the roof and top three logs of the Glen Leslie Church. 2013.*

*Bottom left: The Glen Leslie Church in May 2015.*

*Bottom right: County Councillor Harold Bulford and Wanda Zenner with the Heritage Conservation Award presented by the Alberta Historic Resources Foundation, 2016.*



# A Landscape in Brick

## Douglas Cardinal & NWP’s Cardinal Building

*This article was contributed by Patrick Macaulay. Patrick worked as an Archives Assistant (Student) at the South Peace Regional Archives in the summer of 2022.*

Two landmarks are sure to stick in the mind of any visitor to Grande Prairie: 214 Place, which towers over the city’s core, and the Cardinal building of Northwestern Polytechnic (NWP) (formerly known as Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]), a dreamlike brick palace which seems to wobble and shift as you stare at it. The two buildings are fitting icons for the South Peace region and its history: the inky black monolith downtown evokes the South Peace’s modern dependence on subterranean fossil fuels, while the Cardinal building’s earthy tones and organic shapes remind us of the vast stretches of fertile soil which first drove major settlement in the region. The latter building’s natural look was not an accident: it was driven by the design philosophy of its architect, Douglas Cardinal.

One of Canada’s most celebrated architects, Cardinal

is known for his designs’ naturalistic curves and their mixture of Indigenous and Western influence, reflecting his own mixed heritage. Cardinal takes an idealistic approach to architecture, believing that “our buildings must be part of nature, must flow out of the land,” and deriding modern urban landscapes as soulless and degrading ([historymuseum.ca](http://historymuseum.ca); *Edmonton Journal* 07/19/72, 8). His organic and free-flowing college campus, by contrast, was meant to transcend the rigidity of “oppressive architectural systems” (*Edmonton Journal* 07/19/72, 8).

Whatever shape the campus might have taken, GPRC sorely needed a new home in the early 1970s. When the college began operating in 1966, its classes were held in an abandoned school building. By 1971, it used several facilities, but they were scattered throughout the city (*Edmonton Journal* 05/31/71,

*Below: Frank Kozar took this picture of the Cardinal building in 1973, when the project was nearing completion. Image cropped to emphasize the building. (SPRA 192.05.04.02d)*

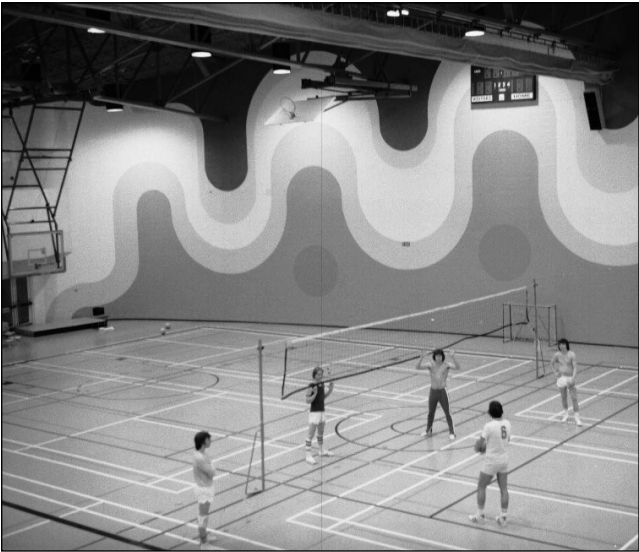


*Right: Students hone their volleyball skills in the GPRC gym. This gymnasium was replaced by a two-story library in the Cardinal building’s 1989 renovation. 1976. (SPRA 192.05.04.06-1976e)*

51). Seeking a more suitable educational space, GPRC commissioned Cardinal, who was then in his 30s and who had never undertaken such a large-scale project. The model he unveiled in 1972 was ambitious, with “hardly a straight line in the design,” and including such quirks as a circular mathematics room wrapped in a curved blackboard (*Edmonton Journal* 07/19/72, 8). Cardinal initially feared his plan would be too costly, but it was eventually greenlit by the Alberta Colleges Commission; construction was completed by 1974 ([nwpolytech.ca](http://nwpolytech.ca)).

Though the finished building, which contained about 800,000 bricks, looked much like the original model, fellow architect Peter Hemingway believed Cardinal’s work had been stained by compromise, complaining that “our urban citizens are neither equipped nor motivated to follow urban poets like Cardinal into a universe they cannot appreciate” (*Daily Herald-Tribune* 29/08/78, 11; *Canadian Architect*, July 1978, 19). Sensing a need for more bricks, Hemingway wrote, “It is obvious that economy has dictated that masonry cannot be used on the interior surfaces.” If Hemingway bemoaned such concessions, he would have been appalled by the major overhaul to the campus a decade later.

In 1989, construction began on an expansion to the GPRC campus, as well as major renovations to the original building. This project was presided over by local architect Roger Field rather than Cardinal, and its design strayed from Cardinal’s signature curves in favor of straight hallways and rectangular classrooms, which were felt to be more practical and cost-effective (*Daily Herald-Tribune*, 02/15/91, 23). Though



the expansion was praised by some students and teachers, Cardinal was disgusted by the changes, and called the project an “illegal act.” Disowning the GPRC campus, Cardinal told a reporter, “I’m advising everyone to strike it off my list of projects. It’s just not my work.” Cardinal also said he would not be attending the expansion’s opening ceremonies. “I would never go to Grande Prairie,” he explained. “All it would do is upset me.” Donna Tink, an official from the college, took an equally icy tone: “He hasn’t made any contribution to the expansion in any way. There really isn’t any reason to invite him, actually” (*Daily Herald-Tribune* 07/11/91, 5).

More than ten years later, however, Cardinal was invited back to the college to attend the dedication ceremony of the college’s newly renovated theater—christened the “Douglas J. Cardinal Performing Arts Centre.” Whether this renovation was less offensive to his tastes, or whether 70-year-old architect had simply softened with age, Cardinal returned to Grande Prairie. His appearance at the ceremony was met with raucous applause and a standing ovation (*Daily Herald-Tribune* 14/02/2005, 1).

# Wide Load

## Moving Towns in the South Peace

When we look at buildings we usually see them as fixed, stationary objects, but this is not always the reality. Throughout South Peace history, there are many examples of buildings that have been moved. Sometimes, this was the relocation of a single building. For example, in 1957 St. Paul's United Church (right) was moved off its site on Richmond Avenue to make room for their new building. The first Grande Prairie Courthouse was also moved across the street to make room to build the second courthouse, today's Centre for Creative Arts.

In other cases, however, entire towns were relocated. These moves were most often a direct result of railway lines. One example of this is Lake Saskatoon, just west of Grande Prairie. The community originally grew around the fur trade, with trading posts for the Hudson's Bay Company, Bredin and Cornwall, and later the Revillon Freres Company, but quickly expanded. In 1914 the community also boasted a drug store, hardware store, restaurants, hotels, the Cana-



*Above: Old St. Paul's United Church being moved off site on Richmond Ave, at 102 St, August 3, 1956.. Campbell Family Fonds (SPRA 032.08.08.0120)*

dian Bank of Commerce, the Dominion Telegraph Office, and the first pool hall in the region. By 1924, however, it was clear that despite their best hopes, the railway line would not be passing through Lake Saskatoon, but rather through the new site of Wembley. The decision was made to pick up the buildings and businesses and move them 4.5 miles south.

The first building to be moved was Bob Krantz's department store, which was removed from its foundation. It was quickly followed by Rogers Drug Store, Neilson's Hardware, the police barracks, and the Bank of Commerce. The pool hall was also

*Left: A view down the main street of Lake Saskatoon, 1916. (SPRA 032.08.08.0971)*



relocated and became Wembley's Methodist Church.

The Church also purchased the two-story home of Dominion Telegraph Operator A.J.H. Roland to become the new parsonage. The relocation of this home highlights a lot of the challenges faced when moving buildings. First, the brick chimney was removed by Reverend Finley and his son Garrison, and the house was jacked up and placed on skids. The plan was for 32 horses to pull the home over the snow-covered roads and fields to its new site in Wembley on April 12, 1925.

Unfortunately, there was a sudden spring thaw in 1925, turning the snow along the proposed route to slush. They only managed to cover half of the distance before a tongue broke. By the time it was replaced it was too late to complete the move that day, so all 32 horses were taken away to rest and reassembled the next day. On April 13, they resumed the journey but soon encountered another obstacle as the two-story home was too tall to pass underneath telephone wires, and the wires had to be cut. Finally, by the end of the day, the move was complete.

In Lake Saskatoon, we have an example of moving buildings to an already existing town, but in other cases they moved an entire town to a new site all its own, as with Spirit River. The town of Spirit River was initially surveyed and a settlement plan developed in 1907. By

*Right: Moving the Spirit River Immigration Hall. The building was too large to move in one piece, so it was split down the middle, allowing you to see the interior of the building as well. (SPRA 676.03.03.09.143)*



1911 the community had a population of 100 residents, and had established the first school district south of the Peace River. The town also had a store, post office, blacksmith, two restaurants, a branch of the Imperial Bank, a hotel, and a drug store. It was believed that the town would become a busy hub once the railway came through, but as is so often the case, the railway had different plans.

In 1915, the Edmonton, Dunvegan, and British Columbia Railway line developed, surveyed, and subdivided "Spirit River City," where they planned to place their railway station, a mere two miles from the existing settlement. Needing the access of the railway, ultimately every business in Spirit River, except the Hudson's Bay Company, moved the two miles to the new location.

These are just a few examples of the many buildings that have relocated throughout the South Peace, showing that our built landscape is a little more mobile than we might expect.

### References:

*Lake Saskatoon Reflection*

*Chepi Sepe: Spirit River*

*SPRA Reference Files: 510.16.13, 510.20.209a*

# New at the Archives

A lot has changed at the archives since our last update in the March issue of *Telling Our Stories*. While our work was focused on processing and new donations earlier in the year, have we shifted to completing important ongoing projects.

Of particular priority was finishing the new QR code system, originally started in February. This required constructing an inventory of every records box in barcoding software, then printing and placing new box labels with unique QR codes. These new labels provide a number of benefits to the archives, including allowing us to easily track records during the move and record use with the new check-out system.

Staff at the archives also recently completed our move out of our offsite storage location. This was an office space we first started renting in 2018 to safely store our backlog of unprocessed records. As we prepare for the move and budget for the renovation of the new space in Centre 2000, it made sense to downsize. The records that were formerly stored offsite are now back at the archives and the shelving system has been temporarily stored at Centre 2000.

The most exciting change in recent months at the archives has been the launch of the new website. Our prior website was built in 2013 and was struggling to keep up with changing technology. Launching this new website gave us the opportunity to revamp the backend, reorganize the website to be easier to search and browse, and visually update it to reflect our new branding. We hope online visitors will find the new website welcoming and easy to explore.

## Thank You for Contributing to our Building Fund

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A special thanks to the following funding organizations for their support of this project:

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