

Volume 15

June 2024

Issue 3

TELLING **OUR** STORIES

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

ROMANCE IN 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: John and Jessamy Archer posing in the Carlisle garden, 1942. (SPRA 399.12.36)

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.



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Letter from the Editor

Spring is a time of new blooms, new beginnings, and new, twitterpated young love. At least, that is what Bambi has led me to believe! Throughout history, love has been seen as a powerful and uncontrollable force, but at the same time social rituals and rules around romance have been very structured and reflect a lot about our society. And so, as we set off on our own new beginnings here in Centre 2000 we decided to take a moment to explore romance and connection in this issue of *Telling Our Stories*.

Before heading out on the first date, brush up your etiquette in “Young Love: A Guide to Teenage Dating.” Keep up with a long distance relationship with “Sending My Love” and “Letter Culture” in this issue’s Archiveology. Finally, fall in love with some of the wonderful romances of our region in “Trelling Their Story,” “With Love, Ena,” “Wartime Romance,” and this issue’s featured photographs in “So Happy Together.” Finally, explore non-traditional relationships in “Partners in Life.”

I would like to thank all of the staff and volunteers who have made this magazine possible. I would also like to take a moment to thank everyone who has supported us during our move to Centre 2000. Finally, I would like to thank all of you, our readers, for coming along on this journey with us, and hope you enjoy “All You Need is Love: Romance in the South Peace.”

Ellyn Vandekerkhove
SPRA Executive Director

Take Note:

Archives Now Open!

We are thrilled to be open to the Public in our new home in Centre 2000! We are once again accepting donations, researchers, and research requests.

We will be open **by appointment**
Wednesday–Saturday, 10:00am—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/>

Cemetery Tours

This summer will see the return of the Archives’ much loved cemetery tours. Join us as we explore the Grande Prairie Cemetery and learn about the lives of the people who have come before.

Keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for more details as they become available.

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.

Have You Heard?

Romantic Gossip in the Newspaper

Reading century-old newspapers reveals that newspaper editors took interest in the romantic affairs of the community, including those of the youth. On January 19, 2017, volunteer Kathryn Auger shared the following article from the January 30, 1923 Grande Prairie Herald on our blog:

The following “Billet-Deux” was handed in to the *Herald* office, as are a great many other articles that are found, with the request that we publish same, with a view to finding the author of it, who can have the original, intact, by calling for it. The note was found in the vicinity of the school and reads as follows:

Dear John:

I am going to the rink tonight, so if you want me to see you after the rink, come over and get me early and don’t go for J—, because she said she wouldn’t go if you did.

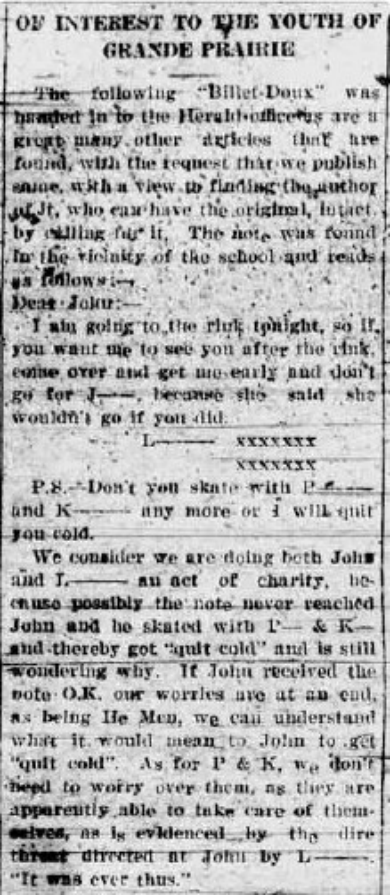
L—- xxxxx

PS—Don’t you skate with P—- and K—- anymore or I will quit you cold.

We consider we are doing both John and L—- an act of charity, because possibly the note never reached John and he skated with P—- & K—- and thereby got “quit cold” and is still wondering why. If John received the note O.K. our worries are at an end, as being He Men, we can understand what it would mean to John to get “quit cold”. As for P & K, we don’t need to worry over them, as they are apparently able to take care of themselves, as is evidenced by the dire threat directed at John by L—-. “It was ever thus.”

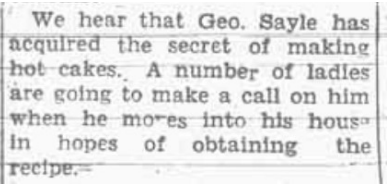
Another example from the January 26, 1934 Grande Prairie Herald is somewhat less direct in its romantic intentions, but gives readers cause to wonder—were the hotcakes really the star attraction or was Mr. Sayle a highly sought after bachelor?

We hear that Geo. Sayle has acquired the secret of making hot cakes. A number of ladies are going to make a call on him when he moves into his house in hopes of obtaining the recipe.



Above: Grande Prairie Herald, January 30, 1923

Below: Grande Prairie Herald, January 26, 1934



Young Love

A Guide to Teenage Dating

In the early to mid twentieth century, young Canadians were able stay in school longer than previous generations. As a result, teenagers spent more and more unsupervised time with their peers, both in school and in their leisure time, and less with their families. According to a 2016 article by Moira Weigel, by the late 1930s, chaperoned romance in particular was largely a thing of the past and teenagers were “developing their own codes” for dating (see <https://time.com/4337410/history-dating-rituals/>).

A 1956 booklet titled *Are You in the Know? About Etiquette, Dating, Grooming, Fashions, This 'n' That*

gives us some insight into the dating conventions of that time. The excerpt in the bottom right corner of this page shows that although chaperones were not as common anymore, parents were still wary of dating. When asked “what to do if Mom says you’re too young for dating,” the author advises as follows:

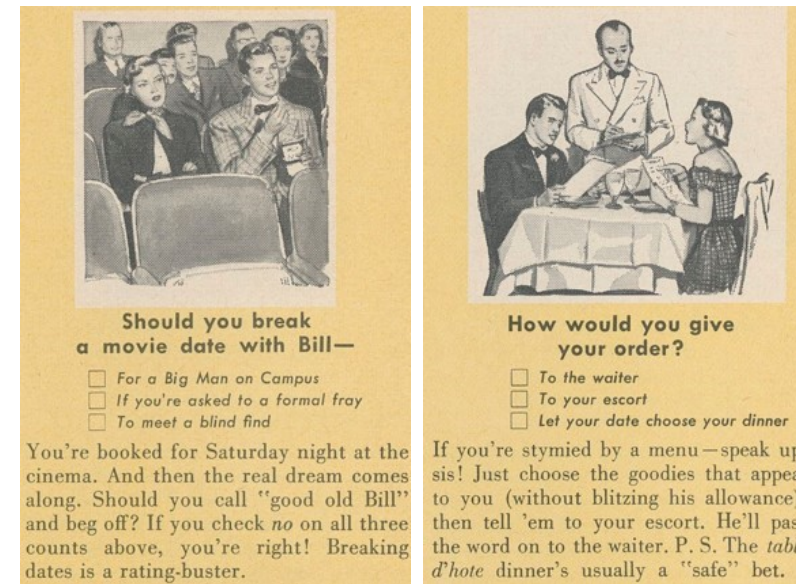
“Chances are, it’s solo dates the family frowns on... Plan some special doings—a hoe-down party. Show Mom you can cope with a mixed crowd. Dating first on the ‘gang’ plan is good practice for solos later.”

Some of the advice in the book has held up to the test of time. For instance, the authors believe that one



Left: Three grade twelve students, Marjorie Mensinger, Ken Leslie, and Sheila Gwartney, pose in front of Grande Prairie High School. 1945. (SPRA 399.11.15)

Below & facing page: Excerpts from *Are You in the Know?* Published by the Kimberly-Clark Corporation, 1956. (SPRA 197.04.02)



should not “break a movie date with Bill” just because someone more exciting comes along. Even today, keeping the date with Bill sounds like the kind and courteous thing to do. However, it seems less likely that women would give their order to their male date to pass along to the waiter. That having been said, the first time I went to a sushi restaurant, I asked my more experienced date to make the selections since we were going to be sharing anyway.

For romantic advice specific to kissing, we turn to the Edna Hodgson series in the Hodgson family fonds (SPRA 630.07). Edna was a teenager in the 1950s and early 1960s, and as the descriptions transcribed below were found alongside her high school yearbooks, we wonder whether she wrote out these notes on kissing during that time, or perhaps copied them from a magazine to share with a friend:

Advanced Kissology

Sentimental type: Closes eyes when he kisses you. Sometimes you wish he would keep them open and watch what he’s doing. You wonder if he is too romantic or if he is pretending you are someone else.

Sloppy type: Comes in for a landing with his mouth open. You have a sensation of sinking into a hot dish of oatmeal.

Passionate type: Makes with the tongue when kissing you. Try biting him, but good!

Brotherly type: Moves Puckers up and makes a smacking noise when he makes contact. You stand it willingly.

Reckless type: Moves head from side to side & puts his hand on your back. Doesn’t seem to get settled. Gets lipstick on you as well as himself.

Insistent type: Doesn’t believe in all good things coming to an end. Finally you turn your head, he gets flustered and so do you.

Perfect type: Comes in for a landing with his mouth closed, turning his head slightly to avoid bumping noses. Parts his lips slightly when kissing you. Starts it gently. It will increase pressure as he progresses. Holds you close in his arms, but not so close that you can’t breathe. Have you one like this? If so, hang on to him.

Analysis of a kiss:

Kiss is a noun because it is common & proper.

It is a pronoun because she stands for it.

It is a verb because it is either active or passive.

It is an adjective because it describes a state of mind.

It is a conjunctive because it brings together & connects.

It is a preposition because it has an object.

Letter Culture

This Issue's Archiveology

Letter correspondences are treasure troves of historical information in the archives. Conversations contained in correspondences can cover a lot of topics that you don't often see in other records. As it was a common way to share information between family and friends or conduct business affairs, preserved letters can describe events across a person's life, both important and mundane.

While email and other online tools are now the most common communication methods, the letters preserved in archives depict a past culture of physical correspondence that connected people together. To support a culture of letter correspondence, the development of a postal delivery system was required.

Prior to the 20th century, a government-supported postal system did not officially extend to northern Alberta. Most letters and packages being delivered in the region were handled privately by organizations like the Hudson's Bay Company.

Official post offices began to appear in the South Peace Region in the early 1900s. The first post office in the Grande Prairie area opened in 1911. It was run by J. O. Patterson and initially operated out of a converted caboose before moving to a permanent building. As other post offices opened in the region, they linked existing services and added new ones, like a parcel delivery service in 1914.

With the arrival of the railway, the postal service expanded rapidly. The Edmonton, Dunvegan, and British Columbia (ED&BC) railway added stations to Spirit River in 1915 and Grande Prairie in 1916. Letters and



Above: Jennie Croken sorting mail in her Ukrainian dress, ca. 1980. (SPRA 112.02.42)

parcels could be transited through the rail system which allowed twice weekly arrivals with mail schedules printed in local newspapers.

With the addition of the Grande Prairie airport in 1929 came the arrival of air mail services. Mail flights between Edmonton and Grande Prairie helped connect the South Peace region to the rest of the country.

In contrast to these developments, the phone system took much longer to develop in the region. One of the reasons was a lack of official support and cost; the Alberta Government Telephone system did not provide service in Northern Alberta. The Dominion Telegraph service did provide a phone line in their offices, but at a steep \$15 a year for access.

Early Peace region phone lines also ran into legal issues that delayed their development. In 1914, Anson Wagar received permission from the Municipal District to run a phone line, initially through existing barbed wire fencing. The line was intended to connect Beaverlodge, Lake Saskatoon, Grande Prairie, Clairmont, and Sexsmith.

However, a disagreement between Wagar and John Taft, mayor of the newly incorporated Grande Prairie, arose regarding permission to operate a phone line in Grande Prairie. This disagreement resulted in a lengthy court dispute that eventually made its way to the Supreme Court of Canada. The remote nature of the many small communities and homesteads of the area also made the implementation of phone lines difficult and expensive. By 1917, only 60 phones and 75 miles of phone line were in operation.

By the mid-20th century, the postal system in northern Alberta had integrated into the larger Canada Post system. With the much slower adoption of phones, mail still served as the main link connecting the South Peace to other regions. Letters helped spur economic interest in the area while also connecting people across vast distances.

Even during this period, letter-based romances were not uncommon. Some couples who met during the First and Second World Wars used correspondence to stay connected and even grow closer. Several women who married Canadian soldiers and later immigrated to the Peace Region have their letters collected in *Fonds 259 War Brides Collection*.

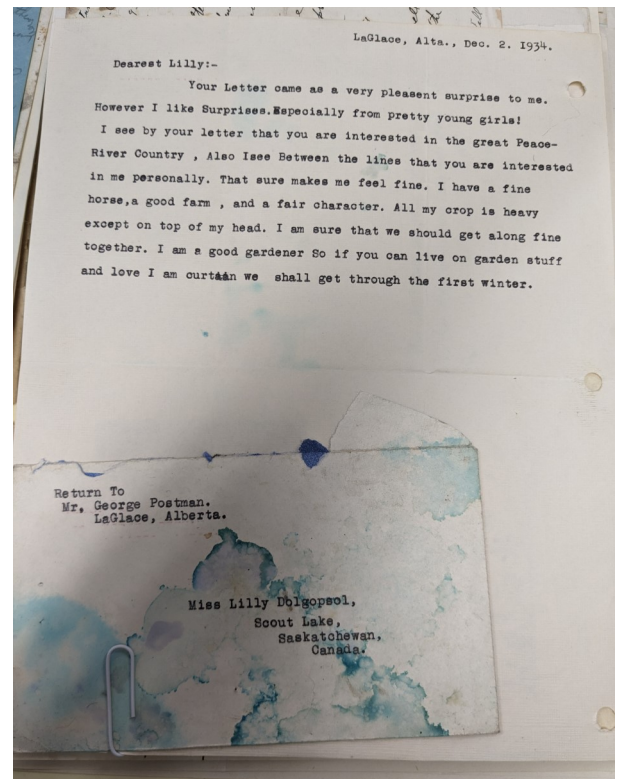
Some homesteaders interested in romance also used letters to engage in matchmaking. An individual could join a correspondence group where they would be matched with some else interested in meeting a po-

Right: Letter from George Postman to Lilly Dolgopsol, 1934. (SPRA 515 Postman Family fonds)

tential partner. Common topics in letters included family, personal interests, and the community or farm where the writers lived. In some cases, each participant would send a photograph along with their letter.

One example of mail matchmaking comes from Fonds 515 Postman Family fonds. A letter was sent in 1934 by George Postman of La Glace, Alberta to Lilly Dolgopsol from Scout Lake, Saskatchewan. While only a few letters were preserved, it is clear from the introduction that they were part of a series.

George shared his sense of humor in his letters to Lilly: *"I have a fine horse, a good farm, and a fair character. All my crop is heavy except on top of my head. I am sure that we should get along fine together. I am a good gardener so if you can live on garden stuff and love I am certain we shall get through the first winter."*



Wartime Romance

A Tale of Two Couples

This article was contributed by Alyssa House. Alyssa is working at the SPRA as the Junior Archivist for the rest of the year, a position funded by Young Canada Works. Get to know Alyssa in her introduction on page 22.

Arnold and Violet Dryer met at a dance in the village of Wrecclesham during World War II. Arnold was billeted nearby in the village of Rowledge while he was stationed at the Canadian army base in Aldershot. Their romance quickly blossomed and the pair kept in touch through letters and met on Arnold's leaves. Their ability to see each other became increasingly limited as Violet joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (W.A.A.F) in England and Arnold was sent to the Netherlands towards the end of the war. Their love endured the distance and after the war they married on August 23, 1945. Arnold returned home to Canada and Violet later joined him in Grande Prairie. The letters Arnold sent to Violet tell the story of their own romance but they also tell the love story of another young couple.

Throughout the correspondence with Violet, Arnold regularly asks about her friend Grace on behalf of his friend Red. On September 12th, 1943 Arnold writes to Violet after an apparent falling out between Red and Grace, after Red was seeing another woman:

I read the few lines that Grace sent to Red and there was more on that piece of paper than what was written in ink. Deep down she was sad and had lost all faith in men, especially Canadians and that is a poor way to take things. ... Well Violet, I hope things are



Above: Violet and Arnold Dryer with their wedding cake in Wrecclesham, Surrey, England. August 1945. (SPRA 553.01)

not through between Red and Grace. Today he was wondering how to break off the other affair—after I had a talk with him and gave him some ideas so I am hoping Grace hasn't quit altogether.

However, Arnold's initial efforts seem to have failed. He explains to Violet that Red attempted to gain permission to marry another woman. He writes to Violet just a few weeks later on October 2nd, 1943:

Well Violet, I saved Red for Grace. I sure had to do some tall thinking as he had already gone up before the Major for permission and also had his medical before I heard about it so I hope she doesn't think as poorly of me as ever. The thing I used on him was that you and her were joining up [in the W.A.A.F] and some way or other I made him like Grace in uniform and I said such a good line that I made myself believe it too.

Arnold and Violet continued to talk about their friends and their attempts to reconcile the failing relationship. Their efforts were not futile because on December 10th, 1943 Arnold writes:

I wonder how Grace felt when she received three letters in one week, sounds like Red is getting ahead of me.

Below: Violet and Arnold Dryer on their wedding day, August 1945. (SPRA 259.02.01)



The interest that the couple had in their friends is quite apparent. Arnold starts off his letter from February 24th, 1944 with:

Red got Grace's letter today and like Grace never tells me a word that was in it when only a few months ago he used to let me read them.

By the June 11th, 1944 Arnold finally got a peek at a letter from Grace to Red. He fills Violet in:

Red showed me one of her last letters and they have improved a hundred percent and apparently she is waiting for him too, things developed more than I thought they had.

Unfortunately, sometime in September 1944, Red was wounded and sent back to England. Arnold writes to Violet about the pair on December 8th, 1944:

I heard from your mother saying that Red was up that way and would soon be going back to Canada. I suppose I shall hear all about Red and Grace's affair in your next letter, I hope it is good.

Sadly, the story of Grace and Red comes to a close. Though Arnold is clearly disappointed by the news, he expresses his love for Violet and his excitement for their future together. In December 1944 he writes:

So Red went back to Canada, it was all the best I think, they wouldn't have gotten along as they were too much the same, but we are going to get along swell, when there isn't anything else to do we can at least fight.

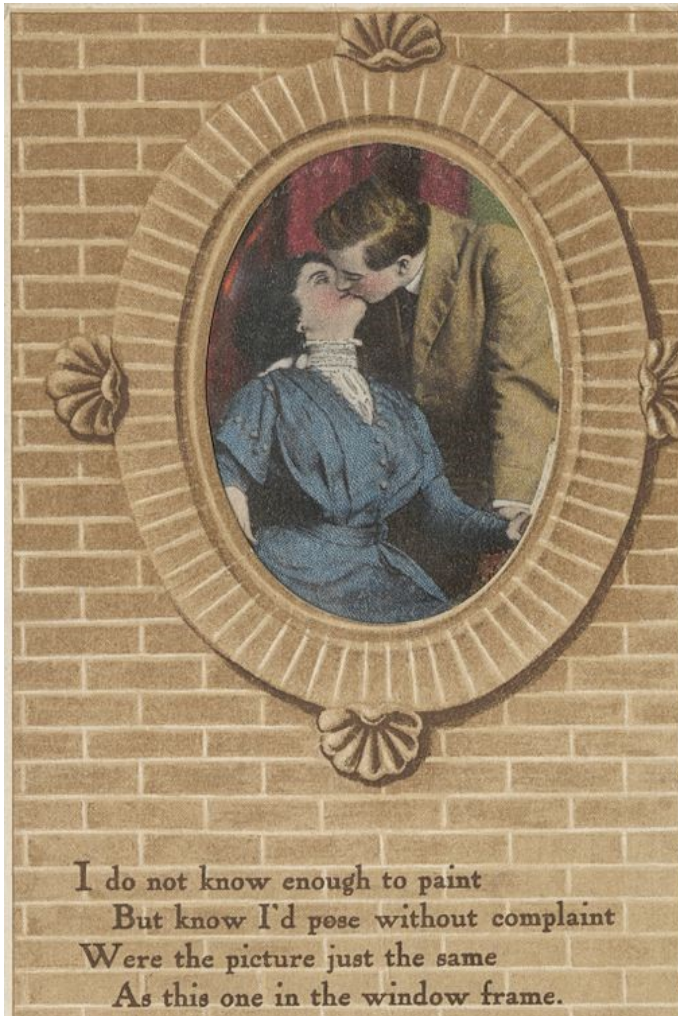
Though the love story between Grace and Red ended, the romance between Violet and Arnold carried overseas back to Canada. Before they were married, on August 1st, 1944 Arnold wrote:

I just received your long 9-page letter, it was swell to hear from you, yes, you are going to be my souvenir that I take back home with me.

Sending My Love

A Selection of Romantic Postcards

Without modern methods of communications, cards and letters were the main method of contacting people who were great distances away. These illustrated postcards were a way for lovers or friends to express humorous, heartfelt, and romantic feelings by mail.



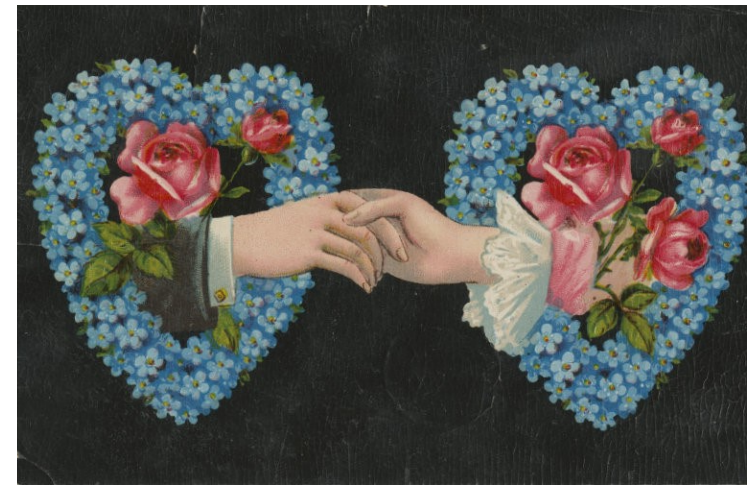
Above: Valentine card reading "To one I Love: Cupids perfected the welding of Our Hearts. They shall never come in parts." N.d. (SPRA fonds 131)

Left: Postcard with the following poem:

*I do not know enough to paint,
But know I'd pose without complaint,
Were the picture just the same,
As this one in the window frame."*

The reverse contains the following excerpt:

"Are you coming home this fall? The cornhusking's are starting around hear [sic]. I think you will soon have a sister-in law down hear [sic]. Well I guess I have told all the news. So goodbye answer soon." 1910. (SPRA 1993.1.1.237)



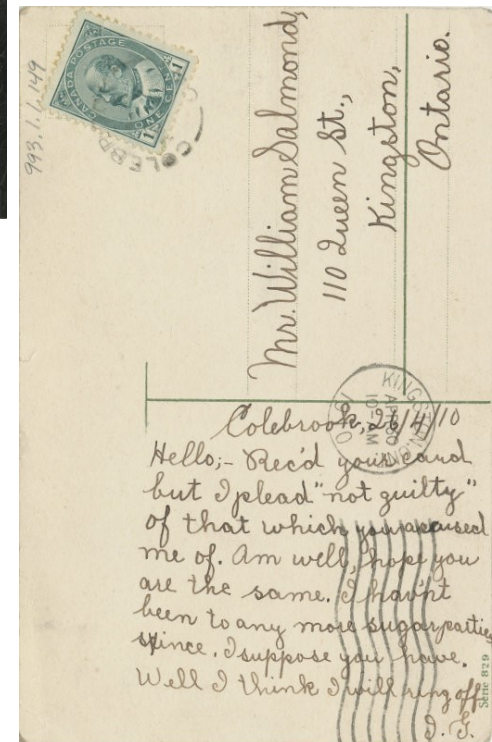
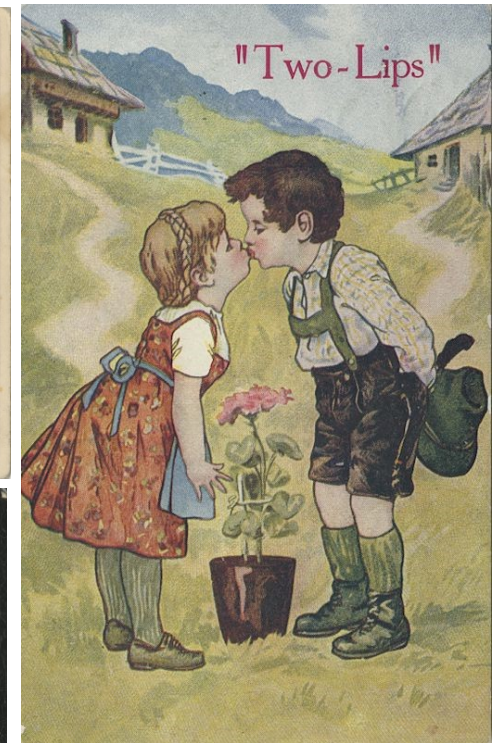
Top left: Valentine card addressed to William Salmond. Reverse reads:

"Hello Will I received your card good to here [sic] from you we are all well hope you are the same. Jim is up in the bay yet father came home to help Gina up in the bay. Edy is with them yet I guess I will close for this time good bye write soon." 1911. (SPRA 1993.1.1.106)

Top right: "Two-Lips." 1908 (SPRA 1993.1.1.065)

Above & right: Postcard addressed to William Salmond:

"Hello; - Rec'd your card but I plead "not guilty" of that which you accused me of. Am well, hope you are the same. I haven't been to any more sugar parties since. I suppose you have. Well I think I will sign off." 1910. (SPRA 1993.1.1.149)



With Love, Ena

The Romance of Ray & Rosina Rappel

Many Canadian soldiers met their brides while serving in the Second World War. Eighteen of these stories are gathered in the SPRA's War Brides Collection (Fonds 259), though many more tales of war-time romance can be found in our holdings.

Ray Rappel was one young man who found love while abroad. He met Jean Goff while based in England and asked his cousin, Ethel Buck (nee Foote), to correspond with her and tell her about Canada. Although the romantic relationship between Ray and Jean did not last, Ethel and Jean struck up a friendship that lasted the rest of their lives. In 2015, when Ethel was 90, the women were still corresponding with each other.

Ray met another woman in England—Rosina Elizabeth Stredder, or Ena, as she preferred to be called. Ena describes her romance with Ray in the first letter she sent to Ethel after they were married:



I am not quite sure who you are, but Ray has a cousin named Ethel & I am presuming that you are she, for I know of no one else of that name in Spirit River who would send me a packet of chocolate, as you have done...

The Government decided to put me at a Training Centre studying Inspection & Direction. After 4 months training I was posted to the factory where I am now. It is only 3/4 of an hour's ride from my home & I certainly am lucky for all the rest of the girls were sent hundreds of miles away. It was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me, for if I had gone with the other girls I would never have met Ray. You may wonder why & how this is so, so I'll explain.

Above: Studio portrait of Jean Goff during World War II. This photo was sent to Ethel Buck. 1942. (SPRA 2014.082.06)

Left: Cousins Ethel Foote and Ray Rappel, 1942. (SPRA 2014.082.01)



Right: Ray Rappel and his English bride Rosina (Ena) in Spirit River, ca. 1944. (SPRA 2014.082.12)

August 1943 I started a pen-pal correspondence with a lonely Canadian soldier named Ray Francis Rappel. After 6 1/2 months continual writing Ray managed to get leave. He arrived on February 16th, the day the other girls left for their jobs in the land of beyond. So now you see why I say that I was lucky in not going with them.

Previous to our meeting Ray had been going out with Jean & had broken off with her. And I, well I had quite a few hangers on—just friends for none of them were Mr. Right in my opinion. When I was writing to my lonely soldier I used to make my folks and friends laugh by saying that I was going to marry him. Somehow I knew that I was in love with him. Then came our first meeting Feb 16th. What a day! Ray arrived home & we had arranged to kiss one another straight away so that we shouldn't feel shy.

When I saw Ray I knew who he was by his photo, but he didn't recognize me as the photo I had sent him was an old one. I asked him indoors & he said, "Is this Miss Rosina's house," when I said "Yes" he enquired cautiously if she was in, when I said I was she, he took a deep breath and said "Well" which meant heaps...

Was I ever so happy before. Not on your life, for here was Mr. Right at last. Two days later Ray asked me to marry him. I said I would if Dad & Mum consented.

They did consent, and Ray and Ena were married soon afterward. On September 11, 1944, Ray sailed from England as he had been wounded in the war.

Ena was eager to meet her new husband's family and had already established a correspondence with his mother, whom she referred to as "Mum Rappel." However, although she was not daunted by the thought of joining Ray in Canada, she hoped Ethel



would offer her guidance as she settled in:

Will you tell me all your side of Canadian life & ways?... For when I get to Canada I want to do just as a young Canadian wife would for I know that would please Ray even though he says my English ways please him well enough. Will you please?

Ena arrived in Spirit River on Christmas Day, 1944, six weeks after Ray had returned home. They had two sons, James and Frederick. Sadly, Ray died suddenly in 1954, just 32 years of age. Ena married Robert Giles in 1962; they had a daughter named Rosina Mae. Robert died in 1974, leaving Ena a widow once again.

Ena's enthusiasm to get to know Ray's family and community must have helped her feel at home in a new country, because she remained in Spirit River until her death in 2007.

To view more photographs and read Ena's letter (SPRA 2014.082.16, fonds 597), schedule an appointment to visit the Archives.

Trelling Their Story

Finding Each Other After the War

This article was contributed by Axel Brett. Axel is working at the SPRA as the Archives Assistant this summer, a position funded by Young Canada Works. Get to know Axel in his introduction on page 22.

When talking about the life of Kay Trelle, most people focus on his storied career as an aeronautics engineer, or the long list of inventions he created later in his life. Less discussed is the story of him and his wife Mae Trelle. Like something out of a movie, the two



Above: Kay & Herman Trelle following their enlistment in WW2. From left to right: Mae Morton, Kay, Ronald, Herman, and Beatrice Trelle, ca. 1939. (SPRA 193.02.08.03)

were separated by World War 2 and found each other nearly 20 years later. Before his time in the Royal Canadian Air Force, Kay Trelle lived in the Wembley area with his parents, Beatrice and Herman “Wheat King” Trelle. In 1942, Kay would begin training in the Royal Canadian Air Force as a pilot and engineer. He met his future wife, Mae Morton, in Vancouver when he stayed on her parents’ farm during his time at a nearby military base. The two of them would both end up aiding the war effort in different ways. While Kay served in the military, Mae worked as an electrician on the same kinds of aircraft as Kay. The tips of bombers needed small people to run the necessary wiring through them. After the war, Kay moved to California to serve in the United States military. In 1949, he attended Cal-Aero Technical Institute to obtain his degree in Aeronautical Engineering. Boeing, searching for engineers to work on military projects, hired Kay to work on missiles and aircraft. During this time, Kay and Mae would lose track of each other as Kay began to work on classified projects such as the Cruise Missile and NASA Moon Buggy.

Mae never forgot about him. For nearly two decades, she never married, believing that Kay had died during the war. She instead travelled to Scotland to train as a nurse, returning to Canada to work as an operating room manager. Meanwhile, Kay spent over a decade working on engineering projects in Canada, Europe, and the United States. Looking for love in his hectic life, Kay briefly married Dorothy Smith. This, however, did not last long, as the two of them would file for divorce in 1950. As Kay’s life began to settle down and



Left: A prototype expandable housing unit built by Roy. Its design would be critical to the modern RV, ca. 1972. (SPRA 438.05.19)

he began working on the Poseidon program, he worked to reconnect with Mae. Like star-crossed lovers, the two would reunite in 1965. By 1966 they were married and living together in Seattle.

Together at last, Kay and Mae would return to Canada in 1972, as Kay began to work with the Lockheed Petroleum Services. In 2002, they would donate their family property outside of Wembley to the Grande Prairie Regional College to preserve the legacy of both Herman and Kay Trelle. It serves as a conference hall for the institution to this day. The two of them were always firm believers in the importance of higher education and believed that the college would put the property to good use while keeping it intact and undisturbed. Mae and Kay Trelle were inducted as diamond legacy donors to the college on November 2nd, 2001.

The two of them would live together until Kay’s death on October 19th, 2011. His health had been declining since he suffered from a stroke in 1987. Mae took

Right: Mae and Kay Trelle, from an article in Focus: Newsletter of the Grande Prairie Regional College Foundation, Vol 3, no.1 Feb 2002. (SPRA 193. 01.03)

care of him for the rest of his life. When guests or journalists came to visit, Mae would interpret Kay’s speech and share his love of engineering. The two of them would live the rest of their lives together. In their free time, Mae focused on volunteering for the Alberta Summer and Winter Games, as well as the Grande Prairie Regional College while Kay continued to work on models of his engineering projects.

In June 2011, Mae would donate much of Kay’s personal records to the South Peace Regional Archives so that his work could be preserved for future generations. These records are now kept in Fonds 438: R. Kay Trelle fonds and 193: Herman Trelle family fonds. Mae would eventually pass on October 31st, 2019 at the age of 94.

The story of the Trelles shows how the love of two people can endure the most difficult of times. Though war separated them for decades, the Trelles were able to find one another and create a life of happy memories despite all the troubles thrown their way.



So Happy Together

This Issue's Featured Photographs

This issue is filled with the stories of couples who found love, sometimes despite challenging circumstances or after months or years apart. These photographs celebrate the joy found with a beloved partner, at any age, while enjoying many kinds of experiences, and in any stage of a relationship. The happiness on their faces is contagious!



Above: Hugh and Margaret (Archer) Ellis sitting together in front of a lake in their swimming costumes, 1939. (SPRA 399.12.45)

Left: Young couple sitting in the snow, ca. 1943. White space cropped. (SPRA 524.28-01)



Below: Unidentified woman and man on a bridge, ca. 1945. (SPRA 524.10-01)



Above left: Marion Ward and Miles Marcy as an engaged couple, 1946. (SPRA 198.01.11)

Above right: Dick and Ursula Lewis on the front step of their home in Calgary, [1985]. (SPRA 195.01.20)

Right: Portrait of Clem and Muriel Collins taken in honour of their 42nd wedding anniversary, 1992. (SPRA 476.03.01.38)

Below: Clarence and Wilhelmina Johnston photographed in 1960. (SPRA 259.04.02)



Partners in Life

Non-Traditional Relationships in the South Peace

Throughout this issue, we have been discussing dating, romance, and courtship. But throughout this conversation, we have been talking about a singular version of relationships, which was by no means universal. Reality, as ever, is far more complicated than what the most common historical records show. In truth, throughout history people have sought out companionship in many different forms.

When conducting historical research, however, it can be difficult to explore these non-traditional partnerships. There are several different reasons for this. First, these relationships were often not socially accepted, and in the case of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, could even be considered criminal. This meant that their relationships were intentionally kept private. Second, from a practical standpoint, these relationships created less of a paper trail. Major life events, such as weddings, create records, from official marriage certificates to family photographs. Non-traditional relationships could not take part in these types of events and therefore they did not leave the same types of public evidence.

The reality is, a modern person looking through what records are left can never truly know what occurred in people's private lives or hearts. All we can do is infer, but in cases where the evidence is sparse, incomplete, and even intentionally repressed, this is incredibly difficult to do. We cannot make assumptions or assign identity to people in the past, but this makes it challenging to be inclusive when discussing the topic of companionship and romance.

I knew all of these factors when I began work on this article, but I still was not fully prepared for how many roadblocks I would come across. In some initial investigating I was able to discover two individuals, Mary Moon and John Sweeney, who seem to have lived with a partner of the same sex for a significant period of time. I dove into the research, trying to find out everything that I could about them. I expected to face challenges in finding the details of their relationship, but in the case of Mary, I was unable to even find out her partner's full name. Given the small amount of information I could find, I considered changing topics for this article altogether. But, I feel that these stories still deserve to be recognized. Due to the lack of historical record, I make no assertions about the nature of their relationships, whether romantic or platonic. I only wish to celebrate the many forms in which people found support and companionship.

The first person I wanted to talk about is Mary Moon. She was born on November 16, 1922 in Bezanson to Catherine and Peter Moon, the second youngest in a family of four. May attended the Bezanson school before moving to Grande Prairie to attend the Grande Prairie High School. She also joined the Canadian Girls in Training (CGIT) club and it was during this time that she became interested in being a nurse.

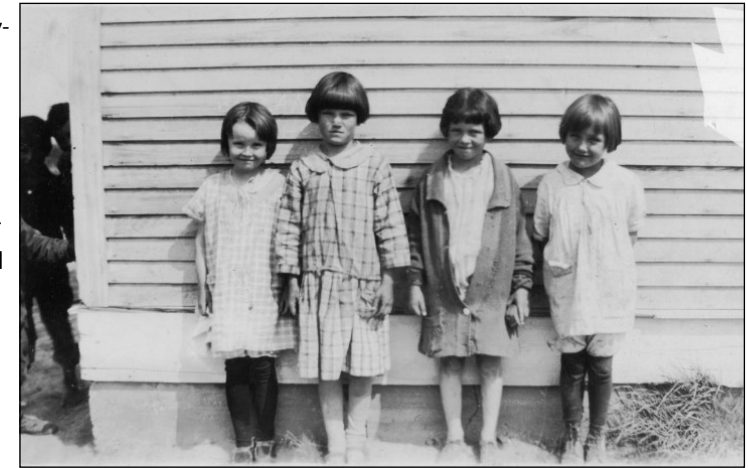
With the outbreak of WWII, however, that dream was put on hold. She enlisted with the RCAF on July 23, 1942 and served as a Flight Sergeant, receiving the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal. Following her discharge, Mary took part in a program sponsored by

Left: Grade 1 at Bezanson: June Ferris, Doris Stewart, Dorothy Johnson, Mary Moon. Photograph taken by teacher Martha Gudlaugson, 1929. (SPRA 2008.046.22, fonds 262)

the Department of Health and the Canadian Vocational Training to train ex-service women as certified nursing aids. Mary completed the program in 1947, and went on to earn her R.N. degree at the Royal Alexandra Hospital. Mary worked as a nurse in Toronto, and continued to study hospital administration and linguistics. She eventually moved into missionary work through the Dominion Board of the Women's Missionary Society in Angola. She first spent time in Lisbon to study languages before being appointed to one of the mission hospitals operated by the United Church of Canada.

Following her return to Canada, Mary returned to the Peace Country while continuing her career in nursing. She began living with her partner, Jean, in a small white house they had built on SE34-71-3-W6. When they moved to Edmonton, they gifted the house to Keith Patterson, who moved it to SW 3-72-3-W6. Mary and Jean eventually settled in Sidney, BC, where Mary retired. Mary passed away on February 12, 1985. Unfortunately, I was not able to find any additional information about Jean.

John Sweeney was originally born April 14, 1864 in Quebec. He came to the Peace Country in 1908 along with his brother Jim, and tried to work as a trapper in Fort St. John. After a short time in the area, the log cabin the Sweeneys were staying in burned down, melting the \$200 in gold coins that the brothers reportedly stashed in the windowsill. With no money to sustain themselves, the Sweeneys were forced to move on from Fort St. John. On July 7, 1913, Sweeney filed for a homestead in Vanrena, near modern day



Fairview. A few months earlier on April 29, 1913 Nyson C. Drew, or "Spike" Drew, had filed for the homestead directly beside Sweeney's. The two men worked together to prove up their land, and may have lived together. As neither man seemed to enjoy farming they relied on trapping throughout the winter to support themselves.

Sweeney and Drew were able to patent their land, but both eventually chose to leave the Peace Country. According to homestead records, both men listed their later residence, or where they were leaving their land to go to, as Missoula, Montana, suggesting that their partnership did not end in the South Peace.

As I stated at the beginning, we have no way of knowing what these partnerships meant to the individuals involved, or what these relationships entailed. All we do know are that these are individuals both Mary Moon and John Sweeney chose to stay with, and that seems worth mentioning in this issue all about connection.

Note: Information regarding Mary Moon contributed to the Soldier's Memorial By Wanda Zenner. Information regarding John Sweeney supplied by the Fairview Pioneer Museum, where Sweeney's house is currently preserved.

New at the Archives

A lot has happened at the Archives since our last issue of *Telling Our Stories*. Renovations at our new location in Centre 2000 are winding down, records have been rehoused in our new climate controlled vault, and we held a grand opening event on May 22nd.

We have now returned to full operations which means the public can visit us to access archival records or contact staff for research assistance. As always, we do ask that you schedule your visit ahead of time, either through the online booking system or by calling the Archives.

The most exciting new development is the addition of two new Young Canada Works staff members, Alyssa House and Axel Brett, who will be working with us for eight and four months respectively.

Alyssa House

Hello everyone! I’m Alyssa House. I graduated from the University of Lethbridge in June 2023 with a Bachelor of Arts in History with Great Distinction. I am passionate about history and always eager to learn or share knowledge of the past. I am particularly interested in studying women in history. My hobbies include travelling to historical sites, reading, and baking.

Axel Brett

Hello Readers, my name is Axel Brett and I am a 4th year history student at the University of Lethbridge. I was born right here in Grande Prairie and have always been interested in the history of the Peace Region. As a writer and researcher at SPRA, I am excited to dig into their records and share my findings with all of you. Outside of work, I am an avid board game player and football fan.

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

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Above: Axel Brett and Alyssa House in the new archives reading room., May 21, 2024.

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