Volume 16 June 2025 Issue 3

TELLING OUR STORIES

THINK GREEN

CONSERVATION & THE ENVIRONMENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE South Peace REGIONAL ARCHIVES

In This Issue

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

Cover: The caption on the slide reads "R.H. Mackay at Wolf Lake." 1958. (SPRA 713.01.292)

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.

South Peace Regional Archives
gather. preserve. share.

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Letter from the Editor

As human beings, we have a continual feedback loop with our environment. Our activities can impact it in a variety of ways, and it impacts our daily lives in turn. We wanted to take a moment to highlight our environment in this issue of *Telling Our Stories*. So join us in exploring our land, and the care many generations have taken of it, in "Think Green: Conservation & the Environment."

Begin by exploring Indigenous land stewardship in "Shaping the Natural Landscape," and see some of the amazing landscapes, flora, and fauna in our featured photographs. Learn about efforts to preserve trumpeter swans in "Local Naturalists," and the impact one individual can have in "A Legacy of Conservation: The Life of Barney Hamm." Explore the work being done by the Andersen family in "Wildlife and Wetlands," and Kay Trelle's dreams of green energy in "Green Machines." Get out for the day in "Preserving Parks," and see some of our amazing feathered friends in "Bird Watching."

I would like to thank all of the staff and volunteers whose work made this issue of *Telling Our Stories* possible. I would especially like to thank our guest contributor Deryle Penner and Chris Andersen for contributing their time and their stories to this magazine. It would not have been possible without your help. We hope that you take a moment to smell the roses, sit in the sunshine, and enjoy "Think Green: Conservation & the Environment."

Ellyn Vandekerkhove
SPRA Executive Director

Take Note:

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.

June 10 and August 12 @ 7 pm

June 14 and August 16 @ 1pm

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

New Exhibit: Kay & Mae Trelle

This summer, we are installing the first exhibit in our new space! The exhibit explores Kay and Mae Trelle's careers and adventures throughout their lives.

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.

Green Machines

Kay Trelle's Alternative Energy Designs

Despite becoming a decorated engineer who worked with companies like Boeing and TRIUMF, Kay Trelle still found time to pursue his own personal engineering projects. While he worked with airplanes and nuclear energy in his professional career, Kay pored over research and drafted new engineering ideas in his free time. These ideas were often recorded with the intention of securing a patent for the design. Kay worked on creating a myriad of designs, including children's toys, buildings, and household gadgets.

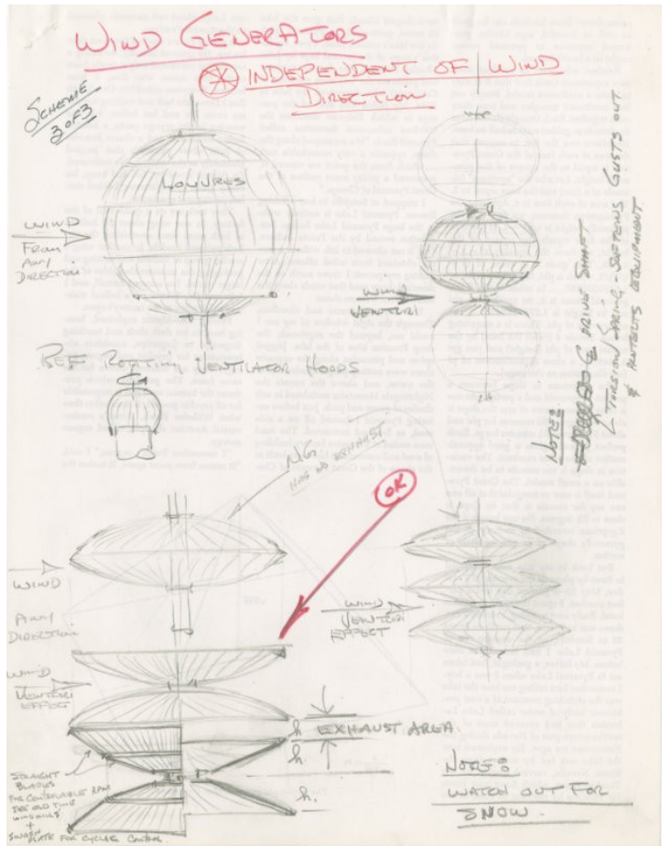
Kay also had a particular interest in renewable energy. He crafted several designs for alternative energy sources, including wind, water, and solar energy. Kay's records on alternative energy hold designs for several machines that were meant to capture and store renewable energy. One example is the "Arc Wind Generators." In his notes, he writes, "Consider wind to operate stored energy then use of an arc generator heating a reservoir of mass." In later notes on the arc wind generator, he elaborates:

A constant RPM is required to directly turn a power generator, and thus RPM must be geared to lower than average speed winds in order to prevent overloading the electrical generator. There is a lot of lost energy. But an electric arc generator increases efficiency with increased RPM. Max efficiency can be utilized from any wind velocity.

Don't miss our new exhibit about Kay and his wife Mae. The exhibit follows more than sixty years of Mae and Kay's incredible lives, featuring their photographs and documents.

Article by Alyssa House

Below: Wind generator designs made by Kay Trelle. 1977. (SPRA 438.02.02.07.04)



Preservation in a Changing Climate

This Issue's Archiveology

Preservation is one of the key activities of archives and museums. Ensuring that records are safe from damage or deterioration means that history is accessible to everyone into the future. However, preservation goes beyond the vault and looks to the impact of the external environment.

The outdoor environment will dictate how an archives designs its facilities and what strategies it will use to preserve its records. For example, in a hot and humid environment, preservation is focused on reducing the temperature and humidity in the vault to prevent damage from mould, pests, or chemical reactions. It is unsurprising then that the effects of climate change significantly complicate preservation.

According to archivist and researcher Eira Tansey (2015), climate change is one of the greatest threats to archives and their collections. The immediate danger of increasingly common and severe disasters like floods or wildfires mean that collections are at risk of total loss or damage beyond recovery. The changes in average temperature and greater instability in weather also mean that ensuring a controlled vault environment is more challenging. In a review of historic sites in the UK, May Cassar (2005) argues that the "save all" approach to preservation is not realistic and that heritage groups like English Heritage face difficult decisions in a changing and worsening climate.

Climate change presents a serious risk to the public being able to access and experience their history, but there are also issues that arise when official government documents held by repositories are damaged. In Dylan Ruediger's interview with Eira Tansey in 2023, Tansey argues:

> *In the aftermath of a disaster, records have outsized importance. People who lose their birth certificates or college transcripts or property records or the photo album showing their hometown neighborhood need to trust that the government or university archives or community archives that hold those records can help them out in their time of need.* (Ruediger, 2023)

There are a number of examples that show how climate change has already impacted archives and their collections. In a paper about climate change impacting libraries, G.E. Ebunuwele notes that even less complex events like heatwaves can have serious effects. A notable heatwave across Europe in 2003 revealed that many buildings, like the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, were ill-equipped to deal with high temperatures which strained climate control systems to their breaking point (p.73, 2015). The increased strain on archival facilities due to unpredictable weather can lead to smaller disasters like pipe bursts, pest and mould outbreaks, or power outages (Ruediger, 2023).

Left: Twister Damage, Herald Tribune*, November 2, 1976. (SPRA 510.08.05)*

So, what can archives and other heritage institutions do to manage these risks? An important first step is having a plan for when things go wrong. As recommended by the Society of American Archivists, an institution should have a Disaster and Emergency Response Plan that includes the polices, procedures, and other information that directs staff on how to respond to and mitigate the danger to people and records. Additionally noted by Tansey, in order to adequately respond to an emergency, an archives needs to have a clear idea of what records they have and which have been damaged to properly prioritize recovery efforts (Tansey, 2015).

Ensuring that activities conducted at an archives are sustainable is also an important step in managing the impacts of climate change. This includes ensuring that acquisition, processing, and outreach choices reflect professional practices and enable future staff to continue preservation work. Conducting work sustainably means staff are not overloaded and are resilient in the face of emergencies (Tansey, 2015).

This also means ensuring that there is an adequate number of staff. In her interview with Dylan Ruediger (2023), Eira Tansey sees staffing as an essential part of responding to climate change, as "inadequate staffing also makes archives more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, as fewer staff are available either to undertake proactive emergency preparedness or to respond to the aftermath of a disaster" (Ruediger, 2023).

All these recommendations to prepare archives for the impacts of climate change share a long-term and proactive perspective. These investments are unlikely to show their value immediately, but all are essential in a crisis.

Article by Jack Lawrence

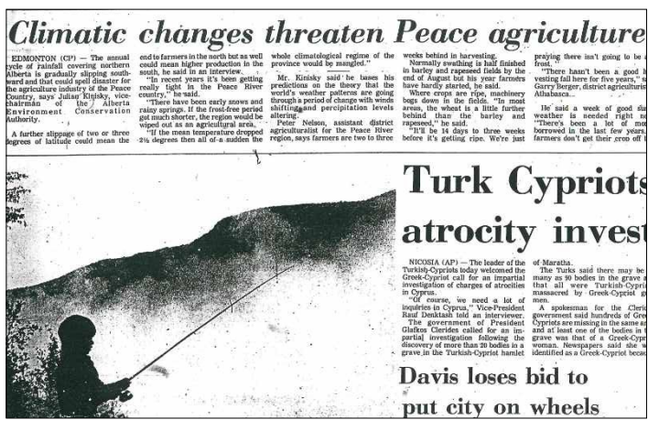
Sources:

Cassar, May (2005). Climate Change and the Historic Environment. www.ucl.ac.uk/sustainableheritage/climatechange/climatechangeandthehistoricenvironment.pdf

Ruediger, Dylan (2023). Archives in the Anthropocene: An Interview with Eira Tansey. https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/archives-in-the-anthropocene/. Accessed 2025-03-11.

Ebunuwele, G.E. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, "Global Warming: Implication for Library and Information Professionals". Vol. 5, No. 6(1); June 2015

Eira Tansey (2015) Archival adaptation to climate change, Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy, 11:2, 45-56, DOI: 10.1080/15487733.2015.11908146


Climatic changes threaten Peace agriculture

EDMONTON (CP) — The annual cycle of rainfall covering northern Alberta is gradually slipping southward and that could spell disaster for the agriculture industry of the Peace Country, says Julian Kirisky, vice-chairman of the Alberta Environment Conservation Authority.

A further slippage of two or three degrees of latitude could mean the end to farmers in the north but as well could mean higher production in the south, he said in an interview.

"In recent years it's been getting really tight in the Peace River country," he said.

"There have been early snows and rainy springs. If the frost-free period got much shorter, the region would be wiped out as an agricultural area.

"If the mean temperature dropped 2½ degrees then all of a sudden the whole climatological regime of the province would be mangled."

Mr. Kirisky said he bases his predictions on the theory that the world's weather patterns are going through a period of change with winds shifting and precipitation levels altering.

Peter Nelson, assistant district agriculturalist for the Peace River region, says farmers are two to three weeks behind in harvesting.

Normally swathing is half finished in barley and rapeseed fields by the end of August but his year farmers have hardly started, he said.

Where crops are ripe, machinery bogs down in the fields. "In most areas, the wheat is a little further behind than the barley and rapeseed," he said.

"It'll be 14 days to three weeks before it's getting ripe. We're just praying there isn't going to be a frost."

"There hasn't been a good harvesting fall here for five years," s Garry Berger, district agriculturis Athabasca...

He said a week of good da weather is needed right n "There's been a lot of mo borrowed in the last few years. farmers don't get their crop off

Turk Cypriots

atrocity inves

NICOSIA (AP) — The leader of the Turkish-Cypriots today welcomed the Greek-Cypriot call for an impartial investigation of atrocities in Cyprus.

"Of course, we need a lot of inquiries in Cyprus," Vice-President Rauf Denktash told an interviewer.

The government of President Glafkos Clerides called for an impartial investigation following the discovery of more than 20 bodies in a grave in the Turkish-Cypriot hamlet of Maratha.

The Turks said there may be many as 90 bodies in the grave that all were Turkish-Cypri massacred by Greek-Cypriot gu men.

A spokesman for the Cleri government said hundreds of Gre Cypriots are missing in the same ar and at least one of the bodies in grave was that of a Greek-Cypr woman. Newspapers said she identified as a Greek-Cypriot beca

Davis loses bid to put city on wheels

Right: Climatic Changes Threaten Peace Region, Herald Tribune*, November 2, 1976. (SPRA 510.08.05)*

Local Naturalists

The Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society

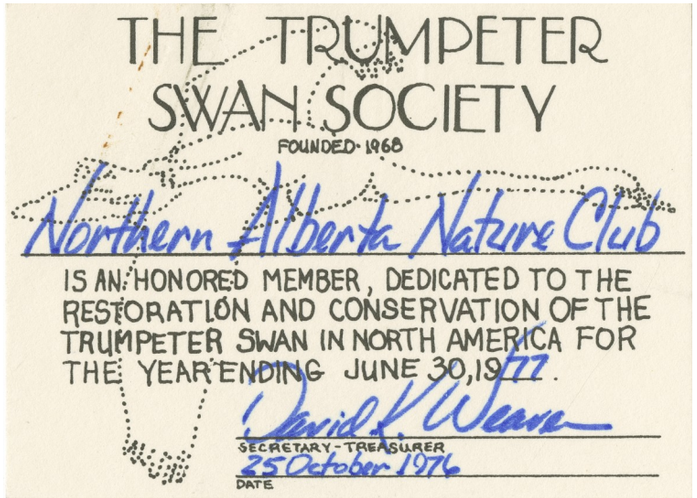
In 1976, the Northern Alberta Nature Club established itself at Lake Saskatoon Hall with only 17 members. Driven by Yvonne MacAlister, the club was formed for nature enthusiasts of the Peace Region. In their own words, the objective of the group was "To promote the study, enjoyment and conservation of nature, and the sharing of information about natural history, particularly in Northern Alberta, through meeting, discussion, field trips publications, and any other desired activities." In 1977, the Northern Alberta Nature Club changed its name to the Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society. Society member Gavin Craig suggested that the group take the new name in honor of the late Bernard Hamm, a local naturalist and taxidermist who worked on trumpeter swan conservation.

Above: The custom crest made for the Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society. (SPRA fonds 106)

The activities of the Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society included monthly meetings where nature admirers could meet and converse about ecological concerns in the area, share animal sightings, and listen to guest speakers. An important activity for the members was field trips and field counts. These counts documented the numbers and types of plants and animals in the region. These field counts were often part of larger counts organized by the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (F.A.N), governing bodies, or other large naturalist groups. These counts were not the only actions taken toward conservation by the society. The group stated in their records, "In 1979 we had a confrontation with the County of Grande Prairie over the roadside spraying program they carry out every year. We feel this is done on some occasions with little regard for our natural surroundings." The Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society was passionate about the conservation of wildlife in the region and confronted the issue through a variety of activities.

The group produced a monthly newsletter. It shared environmental news, field reports, and general updates about the society. The first newsletter published by the society contains this excerpt:

The members took a short hike around the McAlister farm under Monica and Sailor's guidance, 'Sailor' being the family boxer dog, which probably did not help the bird sighting to [sic] much. So there's lesson No. 1. No dogs while birdwatching. We all agreed we have lots to learn about this hobby.


THE TRUMPETER SWAN SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1968

Northern Alberta Nature Club

IS AN HONORED MEMBER, DEDICATED TO THE RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION OF THE TRUMPETER SWAN IN NORTH AMERICA FOR THE YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1977.

David K Weare

SECRETARY-TREASURER

25 October 1976

DATE

Left: Trumpeter Swan Society Membership card. (SPRA fonds 106)

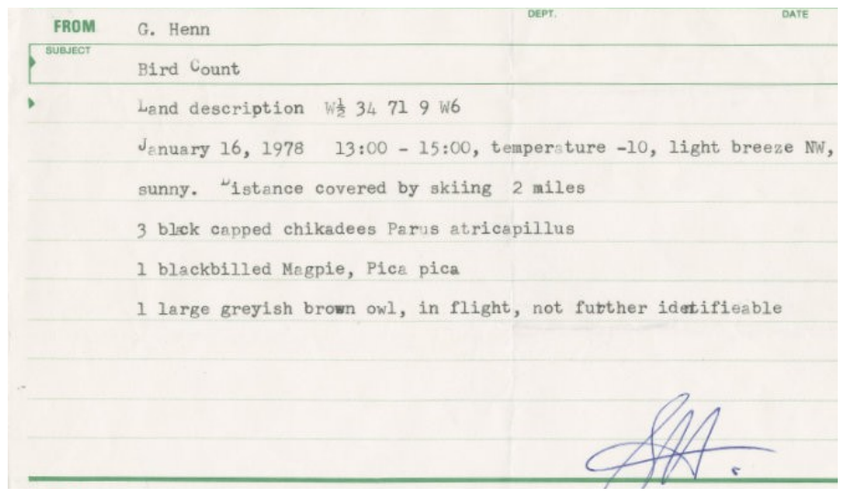
Becoming a member of the Trumpeter Swan Society was especially important for the group as the Grande Prairie area holds the majority of breeding grounds for trumpeter swans in Alberta. Minnesota is also another major breeding territory for the trumpeter swan. Connecting with the Trumpeter Swan Society in Minnesota meant that the Trumpeter Swan Naturalists could work internationally on trumpeter swan conservation efforts.

The Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society was a member of F.A.N., which connected them to several other naturalist societies in Alberta, including the Bow Valley Naturalists, Buffalo Lake Naturalists, and Lethbridge Naturalists Society. These naturalist societies exchanged monthly newsletters with one another. The Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society also shared newsletters with naturalist groups outside the province, including the Timberline Trail and Nature Club of Dawson Creek.

The Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society was also a member of, and shared newsletters with, the Trumpeter Swan Society based in Maple Plain, Minnesota.

The Trumpeter Swan Naturalist Society worked to promote wildlife conservation in the Peace Region for over five years through its varied activities. They maintained connections to other organizations, spreading information about the ecological news of the Peace Region. Though the group reached 54 members by 1980, the group eventually dissolved in 1981. A succeeding organization, the Peace Parkland Naturalists, began in 1989 and still exists in the region today.

Article by Alyssa House


FROM G. Henn

DEPT.

DATE

SUBJECT Bird Count

Land description W½ 34 71 9 W6

January 16, 1978 13:00 - 15:00, temperature -10, light breeze NW, sunny. Distance covered by skiing 2 miles

3 blck capped chikadees Parus atricapillus

1 blackbilled Magpie, Pica pica

1 large greyish brown owl, in flight, not further identifieable

Right: A bird species count field report made by G. Henn in 1978. (SPRA fonds 106)

A Legacy of Conservation

The Life of Barney Hamm

This article was contributed by Deryle Penner, a new volunteer at the SPRA.

Bernard (Barney) Hamm was born on July 23, 1900, in Rhineland, Manitoba, the eighth of twelve children. His parents, Jacob Hamm and Sara Sawatzky, were immigrants from South Russia who arrived in Canada in 1875. From an early age, Barney showed a fascination with nature, spending hours exploring the coulees and riversides near his home.

With only a few years of formal schooling, Barney was largely self-taught. His curiosity about wildlife led him to take up taxidermy, likely through a mail-in course. Despite an accident in childhood that cost him sight in one eye, his ability to spot birds remained unmatched. By 1932, he had already built a collection of mounted birds, which he took to schools for conservation lectures. It was at one such lecture that he met his future wife, Aganetha “Agnes” Dick, whom he married in 1933.

During the Depression, the Hamm family, with their four young children, struggled to make ends meet in drought-stricken Saskatchewan. Barney dreamed of moving north to the Peace River Country, where he had heard of better opportunities. In the spring of 1941, they made the journey to Alberta, initially settling in Crooked Creek before moving to La Glace. Barney worked in agriculture but had little real interest in farming. To survive, he turned to trapping, hunting, and taxidermy. During the winter of 1941, he made a living by hunting rabbits, shooting up to 80 a day, selling the pelts for a dime apiece.

Barney’s reputation as a marksman was legendary. His nephew, Toby Penner, often spoke of his extraordinary skill, including the time he shot a coin tossed in the air. The proof lay in a nicked coin, later presented at a family reunion. Despite his impaired vision, his accuracy was unparalleled.

In 1944, Barney was hired by Ducks Unlimited to study waterfowl migratory patterns, eventually focusing on the protection of trumpeter swans. By 1949, he was appointed a Migratory Bird Officer for the federal government. In the 1950s, he became known as the "Swan Guardian of the Alberta Peace River," working tirelessly to protect the dwindling trumpeter swan population.

Barney’s efforts were hands-on. From spring to fall, he monitored nesting sites, banded birds, and educated the public on conservation. A 1954 article in the *Grande Prairie Herald Tribune* documented his work in banding ten trumpeters. That same year, a fire destroyed his entire taxidermy collection, and the family relocated to Sexsmith, their final home.

Beyond fieldwork, Barney was passionate about education. He brought his taxidermy specimens into schools, captivating students with lessons on wildlife conservation. His detailed records show an extensive lecture circuit in the South Peace region, including a talk at the Catholic High School in Sexsmith on April 25, 1955 where he “spent 1.5 hours explaining the value of our wildlife” and another at River Top School on May 4, 1955 where he "encouraged students to help protect what remains.”

His dedication extended to research collaborations with students, professors, and conservation groups across North America. Despite his lack of formal education, he was widely respected as a naturalist, a sought-after expert, and a guest lecturer at universities such as McGill. He founded the first Rod and Gun Club in La Glace, advocating for sustainable hunting and wildlife management.

Financially, conservation was not always a stable career. His daughter, Darlene, noted that he supplemented his income through taxidermy and a tanning business. A pay stub from April 1954 shows his salary as a Conservation Officer at $215—below the provincial average. Yet, his passion never wavered.

In 1958, Grande Prairie was officially declared "The Home of the Trumpeter Swan," a testament to Barney’s work. By the time of his passing in 1965, his impact on conservation was undeniable. His efforts helped establish protective regulations for trumpeter swan nesting areas, ensuring their survival in Alberta. Today, these protections include:

- Restricted activities within 800m of nesting sites (April 1 – Sept. 30)

- No long-term development within 500m of nesting lakes or wetlands

- No timber harvesting within 200m of nesting areas

The trumpeter swan is no longer listed as a threatened species in Alberta, thanks in part to Barney’s dedication. His legacy lives on in every swan that graces the skies of the Peace Country.

Beyond conservation, Barney was remembered for his warmth and character. Darlene recounted a story that captured his nature: one evening, a large, intoxicated man challenged Barney to a fight outside a beer parlor. Instead of engaging, Barney calmly said, "I don’t like to fight, but I can sing." He then began singing, and the man, disarmed by this response, linked arms with him and joined in. Together, they walked down the street, singing loudly.

That was Barney Hamm—a protector of wildlife, a teacher, and above all, a man whose legacy of conservation and kindness endures.

Sources:

https://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/environment/saving-the-trumpeter-swan

https://open.alberta.ca/dataset land use guidelines for trumpeter swan habitat pdf.

https://naturealberta.ca/trumpeter-swan-recovery/

https://www.ibacanada.ca/documents/conservationplans/abgrandeprairie.pdf

https://www.mygrandeprairienow.com/3273/news/trumpeter-swans-taken-off-threatened-species-list/

The Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry

Grande Prairie Herald Tribune *September 23, 1954*

Family recollections personal notes and correspondence

Source material from the South Peace Regional Archives

La Glace Yesterday and Today*, Harvey Hamm, p. 105, 106, published 1981.*

Below: Caption on the slide reads “Swan landing on Valhalla Lake.” 1955. (SPRA 713.01.316)

Bird Watching

The Swan Guardian of the Alberta Peace River

Barney Hamm, featured in the previous article, became known as the Swan Guardian of the Alberta Peace River for his efforts in protecting the trumpeter swan population. In 2024, the South Peace Regional Archives received a donation of archival records documenting his work as a naturalist, taxidermist, and migratory bird officer (SPRA fonds 713).

Barney's field notebooks record his detailed observations of birds and wildlife in the area. An entry dated June 5, 1962 states that he spotted a "swan nest on west end of Lake Saskatoon with 8 eggs. One slide was taken of this nest." A few days later, on June 8, he writes: "Found a Canvasback nest containing 15 eggs. I took a couple pictures. Also saw a Blue Jay at the Wembley ferry. Also took a 35 mm picture of a Least Flycatcher's nest." The Barney Hamm fonds contains many of these slides, a selection of which have been reproduced here.

Below: SPRA 713.01.107

Facing page, clockwise from top left: SPRA 713.01.159, SPRA 713.01.291 (cropped), SPRA 713.01.306, SPRA 713.01.212 (cropped)

Preserving Parks

Greenspaces in the South Peace

The interaction between human development and natural preservation has historically been handled in many different ways. One common method is to designate certain areas as parks and greenspaces to protect natural environments and allow for public recreation. However, this designation is not always a simple process.

One example of this in the South Peace is Saskatoon Mountain near Beaverlodge. Saskatoon Mountain was left behind as glaciers carved the landscape of the South Peace region, making it a unique geographical location that has often been compared to Cypress Hills in Southern Alberta. As it is on average slightly warmer on the hill than around it, the location is home to unique plant and bird species usually only found further south, and has long been a habitat for local animals. As a unique climate within this region, it was identified as an area to be preserved very early in the settlement of the Beaverlodge region, with W.D. Albright from the Beaverlodge Research Station advocating for it in 1929. Recognizing its importance, Beaverlodge Town Council reserved 11 quarter sections of land for a Provincial Park in 1936.

In 1955, however, Council chose to provide some of the land to CFS Beaverlodge. Residents were surprised to learn that the earlier council decision had not actually resulted in completing the process of designating the area as a Provincial Park. Residents again began advocating for the preservation of the area, with Dr. Bob Elliot requesting that 13 quarter sections, an area previously marked as parkland on County maps, be given full park status.

Finally, in 2018, Saskatoon Mountain was designated as a Provincial Recreation Area by the Province of Alberta after a request from the County of Grande Prairie. This change was to address new challenges in the region, including increasing use of off-road vehicles and incidents of vandalism. The area is still widely used by the community today.

Right: A postcard showing the view from Saskatoon Mountain, looking southwest, and three unidentified women. The postcard was published by the Photogelatine Engraving Co. Limited in Ottawa. Ca. 1940. (SPRA 032.08.08.1128)

Right: People walking through Bear Creek Park, also known as Muskoseepi Park, in 1982. (SPRA 664.03.12.06)

In addition to preserving rural landscapes, preserving greenspace is also a priority within communities themselves. For Grande Prairie, discussions about parkland began almost as soon as it was incorporated as a City in 1958. On May 2, 1958 City Council voted against a development plan by the Junior Chamber of Commerce to establish a park on the north end of Richmond Ave. The decision was made to wait until a long-range plan could be developed for the entire creek valley, rather than working on just one area. City engineer F.W. Beairsto said that “there’s no use doing this piece-meal,” and that “we’ve got to have a proper plan to work from. If we do it that way, it will be that much more attractive.”

A few months later, the Grande Prairie Kinsmen Club brought forward an ambitious plan that included a nine-hole golf course, baseball diamond, new swimming pool, concessions, and an area where visiting midways could be set up. An initial work “bee” on Bear Creek flats occurred at the end of September to start the development. At that time, the Kinsmen Club pledged $40,000.00 towards the development, with other organizations being asked to contribute $30,000.00. The City pledged $150,000.00 towards the project, with any additional provincial funding to decrease the City’s share.

Over the following winter, the City and community worked to develop plans for the park. At the end of December 1958, a six-foot model of the proposed park was on display in Caldwell's Men's Wear store on Richmond Ave. On February 6, 1959 City Council voted to accept the proposal and core designs "in principle," but reserving the right for future changes to be made "over the next 20 years it may take to complete the park."

That timeline for development proved to be largely accurate, with Muskoseepi Park having its official opening on July 26 and 27, 1986, supported by the City, the Provincial Heritage Fund, and various community groups. Many areas of the park had been in operation long before that opening date, and work still continues in many City parks today.

Both of these Parks showcase the generations of work by community members, groups, and local government to protect and preserve the greenspaces and parks in our region.

Article by Ellyn Vandekerkhove

Sources:

SPRA Reference File 510.08.25—Environment and Nature, Parks—Saskatoon

SPRA Reference File 510.08-23—Environment and Nature, Parks— Muskoseepi/ Bear Creek

Wildlife & Wetlands

Supporting Diversity in Our Environment

This article was written based on an interview with Chris Andersen on April 18, 2025.

The Andersen family has a long history of working with the land in the Wembley/Saskatoon Lake area. Erich and Helga began farming in the area around the 1930s, and their son Chris followed in their footsteps. When a particularly heavy spring runoff about ten years ago washed away a large amount of topsoil and carved deep water runs into their property near Saskatoon Lake, Chris and his wife Kathy began to consider a different purpose for the land.

The same spring runoff that impacted Chris and Kathy's land washed out a portion of the adjacent gravel road and filled ditches with topsoil. The County of Grande Prairie used the topsoil from the ditches to fill some of the water runs, and dug a pond (see top photograph on the facing page) to fill more of them. This eventually led to the creation of thirteen more wetland areas on Chris and Kathy's land, as part of Alberta's Wetland Replacement Program (https://www.alberta.ca/wetland-replacement-program).

Shallow wetlands, Chris explained, are a threatened habitat. They may just be shallow depressions and undulations, and therefore easy to drain or fill—or destroy—in the process of developing the land. Most of the wetlands on the Andersen property are this type—moist, transitional micro-habitats that fill with water in the spring, but are usually dry by fall. They were created by scraping back the topsoil, digging a shallow depression in the clay, and spreading the topsoil back over the depression to give reeds a place to grow. Some aquatic plants were introduced to these wetland areas, Chris told us, while others, like cattails, grew naturally. Various types of frogs, snails, and insects also thrive in this type of habitat; in one of the wetlands, we saw a frog surrounded by clusters of eggs. Even the logs lying next to the wetland contribute to the environment. They were dragged to the edges of the wetland intentionally, providing a roosting place for birds and a habitat for insects that thrive in wet, rotting wood. "It's all about creating spaces for diversity," Chris said.

Above: Chris's parents, Helga and Erich Andersen, longtime farmers in the Wembley area. 1976. (SPRA 192.05.03.04b)

Left: Saskatoon Lake with Saskatoon Island in the middle. Grassland is visible in the foreground. Ca. 1910 (SPRA 1969.29.33.011, fonds 056)

Left: The pond on Chris and Kathy's land, with the structure supporting the bat house and bank swallow nests in the background. April 18, 2025, courtesy of Chris's nephew Tim Moore.

Below: Dead wood surrounding one of the wetland areas. April 18, 2025, courtesy of Tim Moore.

With the goal of diversity in mind, Chris and Kathy have also created spaces to entice snakes, bats, and birds. A biologist working for the Alberta Conservation Association once saw a snake on the land and wondered whether they might be wintering somewhere in the vicinity. With the expert support of consultants hired by the County of Grande Prairie, Chris and Kathy built a snake habitat by piling up stones and concrete chunks, then covering them with soil. Weeping tile created tunnels through which snakes could access hollow spaces inside the mound.

The structure visible in the top photograph on this page supports a bat house and numerous clay birdhouses. Chris made the birdhouses to mimic the mud nests built by bank swallows. So far, the Andersens have not seen evidence of bats and bank swallows using these spaces. The fifty wooden birdhouses Chris has placed all around the land for tree swallows, on the other hand, are at about 80% occupancy. Every spring, Chris places a handful of fresh sawdust in each birdhouse to make them a little more comfortable, and every fall he cleans out the mess left behind by the summer's inhabitants.

A local beekeeper keeps his breeding stock on a corner of Chris and Kathy's land. Even as we drove

up to the land, we saw quite a large number of bees flying around—unusual for a cool day so early in the spring. “We’re out of sync with land used for agriculture,” Chris explained. While fields covered in stubble have little to offer bees, aspen catkins and pussy willows provide them with an early source of nourishment before the crops start growing.

Plant life on the Andersen property is as diverse as the animal life. Early on in the project, Chris and Kathy partnered with the Alberta Conservation Association to seed the land with grasses similar to those that would have grown there before cultivation. Foster’s Seed & Feed blended the seeds of about seven different grasses, including several different fescues and crested wheatgrasses. This was completed over a period of three years. Brome grass and sweet clover came in naturally. The County of Grande Prairie committed to three years of weed control, which eliminated scentless chamomile. Eliminating tansy and Canada thistle, however, is an ongoing struggle.

A federal initiative to plant two billion trees by 2031 (https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/2-billion-trees.html) opened up another opportunity for the Andersens. Approximately 34,000 trees were planted on their land in 2024, including spruce, aspen, alder, willow, dogwood, chokecherries, buffalo berries, and saskatoons. Besides adding to the biodiversity, the trees will eventually form a windbreak, reduce erosion, help the soil retain more moisture, and help filter the run-off water that runs into Saskatoon Lake. The established grasses are “tough competition” for the trees, Chris said, but he is hoping for a 5% to 20% rate of survival.

Although Chris and Kathy’s project has been on quite a large scale, Chris emphasized that there are ways to add diversity to the environment on a much smaller scale too. “If you have an acreage, look around and

Above: View of Saskatoon Lake from Chris and Kathy’s land. April 18, 2025, courtesy of Tim Moore.

see if you have any natural depressions or undulations that could become small wetlands,” he suggested. “And anyone can put up a birdhouse.” He recommended nestwatch.org as a helpful resource for researching different types of birdhouses. Replacing lawn grass with other types of grasses, or flowers that attract bees, and reducing the use of chemicals also benefits the environment.

As we came to the end of our walk, I asked Chris what has been the most rewarding part of giving their land back to nature. He told me about the delight of seeing birds, foxes, moose, and deer enjoying the land. Even in our (much too short) two hours of exploration, we’d seen geese, ducks, frogs, and bees benefiting from the habitat he and Kathy have nurtured for a decade. “None of this would be happening if this was just a field of stubble,” Chris said. “Sure, we’ve given up some farming revenue. But there’s obviously tremendous value to the environment, and how can you put a number on that?”

Interview & article by Teresa Dyck

Shaping the Natural Landscape

Indigenous Land Stewardship

Indigenous peoples across what is now Canada each have long traditions of proactive management and stewardship of the land. Rather than viewing the land as a resource base, Indigenous stewardship practices take a holistic approach that connects people with the natural landscape, and the physical with the cultural aspects of the environment.

In their research on the history of cultural burns and Indigenous land stewardship in the Pacific Northwest, Courtney Julia Fitzpatrick maintains that controlled burns by Indigenous land stewards were an important tool in both conserving and shaping the land. For example, burning could prevent the encroachment of forests into grasslands and promote the growth of berry bushes (Fitzpatrick, p.9, 2024). Combining burns with pruning, selective harvesting, and other stewardship techniques, Indigenous communities historically altered the landscape to increase the productivity of an area.

Land stewardship practices were historically used by Indigenous peoples whether they were settled in a single area or nomadic. For nomadic groups in particular, land stewardship was part of a systematic routine of migration that balanced the needs of the community and the environment (Fitzpatrick, p.15, 2024). This connection between land management and a community’s way of life highlights the holistic approach of Indigenous stewardship knowledge.

However, with the expansion of colonial settlement across the continent came a significant disruption of traditional Indigenous land stewardship. Many practices were restricted or outlawed through legislation. Cultural burns in particular were banned through the Indian Act and the Bushfire Act, impacting traditional resource management and ways of life in Indigenous communities.

Discussing controlled burns in particular, Fitzpatrick notes that wildfire management in the 19th and 20th centuries took a perspective focused on resource extraction. This new approach sought to extinguish any fire to protect valuable timber and settlements, disrupting traditional fire regimes (Fitzpatrick, p.23, 2024). In combination with clearcutting to develop more agricultural land, these strategies have increased the frequency and severity of wildfires.

Today there are a number of organizations that support the development of land stewardship programs in Indigenous communities across Canada. In Alberta, the Treaty and Aboriginal Lands Steward Association of Alberta (TALSAA) sees land stewardship as a support to “First Nation communities in their journey to self-sufficiency.” For many organizations in Canada like TALSAA, land stewardship is an important aspect of self-governance and cultural identity.

Article by Jack Lawrence

Sources:

Fitzpatrick, C. J. (2024). Mastering Wildfire: A History of Indigenous Land Stewardship and Coexistence with Fire in the Pacific Northwest [G]. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0441994

Treaty and Aboriginal Land Stewards Association of Alberta - https://www.talsaa.ca/

Land Needs Guardians - https://landneedsguardians.ca/

Earth Day, Every Day

This Issue's Featured Photographs

Wendell Berry wrote that "the Earth is what we all have in common." Here are some images of the landscapes, flora, and fauna with which we share our region, and a few of the people who participate in caring for our environment—something we can all contribute to.

1: Bear Creek Reservoir, originally the water supply for the town of Grande Prairie. 1970. (SPRA 002.05.03.028)

2: First Rainbow Trout Plant at Two Lakes showing Curly Wren from Brooks Fish Nursery. 1959. (SPRA 256.03.26)

3: Foster and Crossley beside a couple of hives, September 6, 1934. Photograph by W.D. Albright. (SPRA 362.02.03.06)

4: The Kleskun Hills were a major geological attraction in the 1950s. (SPRA 1969.39.730c)

5: Prairie Provinces Annual Forestry Film Tour with Dave Schenk and Greg Stevens flanking Bertie the Beaver. Ca. 1956. (SPRA 256.03.19)

6: Wild Buffalo, Wood Buffalo Park. Ca. 1930. (SPRA 362.02.10.19)

7: View of the Peace River showing a low water level in 1910. (SPRA 001.06.02.058)

8: Native saskatoons and native spruce planted in 1919. Photographed June 1927 by W.D. Albright. (SPRA 362.02.08.056)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New at the Archives

The arrival of summer brings us lovely views from the windows in our new reading room, but the warmer weather means staff are also vigilant inside to ensure that the vault stays cool and dry. With the new season also come donations from a variety of places.

Many new donations to the archives come from groups like the Grande Prairie and District Chamber of Commerce (2025.003), the Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association (2025.004),the Greenway Cemetery (2025.005), the Grande Prairie Golf and Country Club (2025.008), and the United Way (2025.009).

Above: Framed Swan Pencil Sketch (2025.008)

In processing news, there is one set of accessions that the archivist is currently tackling, donated by Paul Pivert. For many years Paul ran the Panda Camera photography store in downtown Grande Prairie, but he was also an avid photographer in his personal life. There are thousands of photographs across Paul's multiple donations to the South Peace Regional Archives.

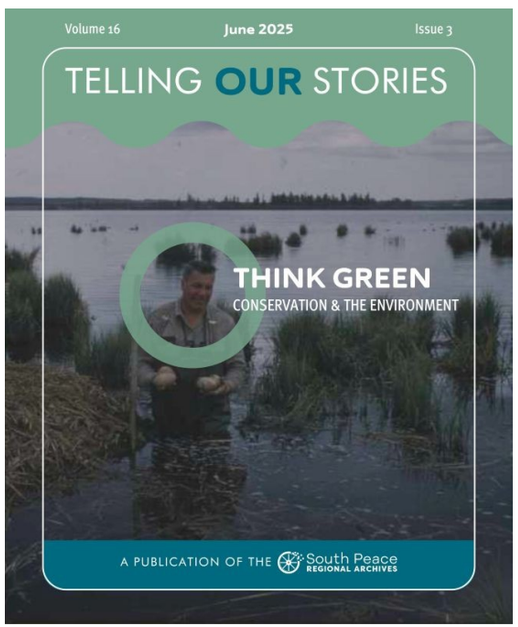
The Digital Switch

With rising postal and printing costs, and the second postal strike in six months on the horizon, the Board of the South Peace Regional Archives has decided to switch to digital delivery.

What does this mean for you?

Starting with the March 2026 issue of *Telling Our Stories,* all existing subscriptions will default to digital delivery. Not only does this mean you will receive your copy of *Telling Our Stories* sooner, you will also see all photographs in their original colors (whether that be full color, sepia, or black and white), rather than just the cover and centerfold. Effective immediately, all new memberships will default to a digital subscription.

If you would still like to receive a paper delivery, you can opt in by checking the check box at the bottom of the membership form on the following page.



South Peace Regional Archives Society Membership Form

Scan the QR code at left to go directly to our online store and purchase your membership by credit card, or visit the following link:

https://www.southpeacearchives.org/about/society/

Please note that all new memberships will default to a digital subscription to *Telling Our Stories,* and beginning March 2026, **all** memberships will default to a digital subscription unless you specify that you prefer paper delivery at the bottom of this page.

If you prefer to pay by cash or cheque, please send it to:

South Peace Regional Archives Society
Lower Level, Centre 2000, 11330 106 St.
Grande Prairie, AB T8V 7X9

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