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Group photograph of WWI Headquarters Staff (Third British Army) with Charles T.M. Turner second from left in front row, ca. 1915 (SPRA 2005.053.06)

Take Note

Interested in learning more about:
DNA tests and what they can tell you about your ancestors?
Basic Genealogy?
Genealogy online?

You are invited to attend

Family History Day

Saturday, February 25, 2017
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Grande Prairie Public Library

featuring
Leslie Anderson from Ancestry.ca
Dear Members & Supporters;

I am pleased that we are once again increasing the distribution number for “Telling Our Stories.” Some of those will go to the sixteen new members who have signed up in the past few months, but we have also added the seven Grande Spirit Seniors Lodges to our “free” list. Thanks to board member Beth Sande for that suggestion.

Our theme for this newsletter is Immigration, but as usual, there are several topics which over-ride that theme, including a Belgian researcher with a World War II project in the community of Wommelgem on p. 5; a newly donated artifact from Doug & Angie Crerar on p. 18; a story about Peace Country settlers in Yellowknife from our relocated Leslie Gordon on p. 20; and a story about the first postmaster in Bezanson by Society member Wanda Zenner. We truly appreciate these submissions. It makes our newsletter more vibrant and interesting to read, as well as supplying more material for the Archives.

Since we have several volunteers working on our “Soldiers” Memorial,” we decided to include some of those stories as well. The featured photographs in this issue are of the display Archivist Patricia Greber created for Archives Week 2016 on the theme “Coming to Alberta.”

If you’re wondering what’s been happening at the Archives, check out our most recent donations on p. 26 and maybe you can help us find the answer for a researcher in Italy on p. 24.

Our building fund continues to grow thanks to a donation from the Hythe Homecoming Committee 2016 (p. 26) and our Raising the Archives fundraiser (p. 25). Thanks to attendees and donors, we were able to add another $10,000 to our building fund from that event.

Thanks for supporting a Regional Archives, and have an excellent Christmas!

Sincerely,
Mary Nutting, editor

December 1, 2016

TELLING OUR STORIES

PUBLISHED BY
South Peace Regional Archives Society

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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.

We often get requests from researchers at the archives but a recent request about a local soldier was quite touching. A member of the Heemkring (local history society) ‘De Kaek’ of Wommelgem, near Antwerp, Belgium, Niko Van Kerckhoven, sent us an email inquiring about WWII soldier Adam Tolway.

Adam Tolway was born in Poland in 1922. Together with parents Frank and Eva, and siblings Ludwig, Evelyn, and Mary, he arrived in Canada in 1927. Their final destination was Lymburn in 1928. The Tolway children attended Lambert School. As he got older Adam helped his father on the farm, and later he worked as a section man for the Northern Alberta Railroad. Adam signed up for WWII in Grande Prairie on April 2, 1943 and was stationed in many different locations in western Canada.

Adam was able to speak Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, and English which may have been an asset to his military career. He was transferred to the Calgary Highlanders and left Canada in August 1944 for active service. On August 30 he arrived in France and on September 22, 1944, Adam and his unit reached Belgium.

...linking the different regimental histories to the few eyewitness accounts we have to the ‘locals.’” Niko also states that he is “...a guide in one of the Antwerp fortresses, Fort 2 at Wommelgem, which was used as an Advanced Dressing Station by the 18th Canadian Field Ambulance, although Private Tolway was already dead when he was transported from the Albert Canal Bridgehead. In fact, he died very close to the spot where my wife’s office is located nowadays... It brings history very close and personal to us.” Adam was initially buried in Wommelgem but his remains were later moved to the Canadian Cemetery at Bergen-op-Zoom in Holland.

We were able to help Niko with his request. A Facebook post generated a lot of interest in this story. Alec McPherson of Beaverlodge scanned a photograph of Adam that was hanging in the Hythe Legion and we shared that with Niko. The West County News also ran the story and a few days later one of Adam’s relatives, Mary Fowler, stopped in at the archives with some documents and photographs that she had.

It was a community effort to find what we could about Adam and in the end we are happy to learn of Niko Van Kerckhoven’s project that is in the process of “...linking the different regimental histories to the few eyewitness accounts we have to the ‘locals.’” Niko also states that he is “...a guide in one of the Antwerp fortresses, Fort 2 at Wommelgem, which was used as an Advanced Dressing Station by the 18th Canadian Field Ambulance, although Private Tolway was already dead when he was transported from the Albert Canal Bridgehead. In fact, he died very close to the spot where my wife’s office is located nowadays... It brings history very close and personal to us.” Adam was initially buried in Wommelgem but his remains were later moved to the Canadian Cemetery at Bergen-op-Zoom in Holland.

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Pierre Lozeron was born in 1887, in Auverern, Canton of Neuchatel, Switzerland, where the family were grape growers and wine merchants. When the family of six children lost both parents, Pierre and his younger brother Jean decided to seek their fortunes in America. A sister, Sophie, also immigrated to the States. The brothers left Switzerland in 1910, when Pierre was 23 and Jean 20 years of age. By that time, Pierre had completed a time as sharp-shooter in the Swiss Army and Jean had taken some Agricultural College courses. They were well-prepared for a pioneer lifestyle in the Peace Country.

After spending two years farming in Nebraska State, Pierre went on to the Peace Country, and in July 1912 walked in over the Edson Trail with his friend Charlie Heller. He chose the NW 10-73-7-W6, northwest of Bear Lake, for a homestead. Here there was a natural flowing well in a little forest giving him a fresh supply of water and wood for fence posts. But the biggest attraction was that it was all open land on the slope up from Bear Lake, a warm slope like they had for raising grapes in Switzerland. He also claimed the adjoining quarter section, SW 16-73-7-W6, for his brother Jean.

Traveling over the long trail with their supplies, the Lozeron brothers arrived to stay in December, 1912. They lived, that winter, in the box of their sleigh, with snow banked around it and a tarp for a tent on top of it. The next year they built a log cabin with a sod roof and a cross on the front of it like a Swiss flag.

In 1918, Dora Koberg made her first trip to the Peace Country with the Thomas family from St. Paul’s, Minnesota. Dora was born in Berlin, Iowa and attended a Presbyterian Teachers’ college in Minnesota. In 1926 Pierre and Dora were married.

In 1939, a new family farm home was built by William Balisky. The couple raised three children on the land that Pierre had filed on: Paul, born in 1927, became a medical doctor in Neuchatel, Switzerland; Homer, born in 1934, became a biochemist in the United States; and Andre, born in 1939, received a degree in agriculture from the University of Alberta and became a farm commentator for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. In 1939, a new family farm home was built by William Balisky.

The children attended Canuck School and later high school in Grande Prairie. Both Pierre and Dora were active with the United Farmers Association, Pierre as president of the Canuck U.F.A. Local, and Dora as a member of United Farm Women. During the development of the DEW Line and Radar stations after World War II, Dora was a civilian plane spotter (call letters EKBL 0218) for the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Although, like many immigrants in the early 20th century, Pierre and Dora rarely saw their families again, they carried on a voluminous correspondence, especially with the Lozeron extended family. Dora passed away in 1978, and for his final years Pierre lived in the Red Willow Lodge in Valleyview, then in Heritage Lodge in Grande Prairie. He passed away in 1980.

The management of the Lozeron family farm was taken over by Andre and Verna Lozeron circa 1955. They farmed until Andy’s failing health forced them into retirement. The land and home was then rented out to neighbours.

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There were not many ways to get to the Peace Country when it opened up for settlement. The first option was to walk. Later the train arrived, and some brave souls travelled by car. Left: Settlers, wagons, horses, and car outside buildings and corral on the bank of the river, ca. 1911. (SPRA 1984.258.53c)

Why did they come?
Was it our fantastic weather, our metropolitan lifestyle, or maybe the modern conveniences boasted of by Peace Region residents? Not really. The main reason was land, land, land. In 1910, when Grande Prairie land opened for settlement, there was a stampede to apply; in one day alone there were 300 applicants for a homestead. Some people came because they thought it would be a big adventure, but many were unprepared for the struggles of living in a remote location and an unforgiving climate.

How did they get here?
Them boots were made for walking. Early settlers had no option but to walk to Grande Prairie. The first route was via the Long Trail, but in 1911 the Edson Trail opened up which made the journey much quicker, and in 1916 the train arrived which became the chosen form of travel.

Where did they arrive from?
The settlers journeyed from all over the world, as you can see from the passports: Europe, the States and from all over Canada. Most of the early settlers took out homesteads and worked on the land while others settled in town, starting businesses for the growing population.

Above: One often hears about the bachelors who settled in the Peace Country, but many times families would make the journey. This is the Miller family on the Edson Trail on their way to Pouce Coupe, ca. 1911. (SPRA 0032.08.08.0271)

Above left: The indigenous people helped early settlers find food and in later years would often be guides on their hunting expeditions. This Cree family acted as guides on the Macklin’s trip to Nose Mountain, ca. 1935 (SPRA 177.070)

Below: Once the settlers arrived on the trail they had to find a way for their supplies to be transported to their homesteads. In 1917 a large group of Norwegian settlers arrived from Minnesota and encountered this dilemma. Karl Dolemo (second from right) arrived with other Norwegian settlers from Minnesota at Valhalla on April 11, 1917. (SPRA 0256.02.02)

Above right: Peter Elaschuk’s passport, 1926 (Fonds 116)

Left: Grande Prairie Train Station in winter, crowded with people and cars. The horse-drawn dray unloading the Royal Mail from the mail car in the foreground belonged to Mr. Alex Wishart. (SPRA 1997.13.07)
Left: O. Haaksted, Gilmore, Haaksted, Tommy, Lloyd, Arnold Christianson, and Schimler on a journey from Cecil Lake near Fort St. John to find homesteads, ca.1940. [SPRA 0483.01.34-09]

Above & left: Teodor Koda’s passport (Fonds 192) and Certificate of Naturalization (SPRA 2011.42)

Above: At a stop along the trail this young boy was in charge of the calves, ca. 1911. The wagons and carts were strategically placed to form a perimeter fence for the animals. The feed was then spread inside the circle to keep the animals contained during rest stops. (SPRA 2001.01.185)

Right: Lorenz & Martha Rozinsky’s passports (SPRA 2015.086)

Left & below: The homestead of brothers Charles and Arthur Buck who arrived from England, ca. 1910 (exterior SPRA 298.05, interior SPRA 298.04). They both signed up for WWI. Arthur fought for Canada and was killed in 1917. Charles went back to England where he joined the British army and was badly gassed. He returned to the homestead near Lake Saskatoon in 1918 but never fully recovered. Charles died in 1920 and is buried in the Lake Saskatoon Cemetery.

Above left: passports for Marie Lunde (Fonds 517) and Mathias Eggenheim (Fonds 169)

Above: A young girl in charge of the oxen team who are pulling a covered wagon, 1912. This could possibly be Euphemia McNaught. (SPRA 586.07.094)

Left: Load of settlers’ effects pulled by a team of horses on the way to Bear Lake, ca.1911. (SPRA 2001.02.760)
Antoni Wozniak and Maria Parachin were both born in Poland in 1903. With poor opportunities in Poland and rumors of hostilities amongst nations, they decided to immigrate to Canada with their family. They had hoped to be able to go to Toronto, but ended up on a farm in the Wanham area, arriving June 24, 1930. Our newsletters this year will feature excerpts from Maria’s memoirs, telling the story of their first years on the prairie. This episode begins in the fall of 1937.

In the fall of 1937, my husband went to stook and thresh. I will always remember the twenty-ninth of September, it was our first harvest, we threshed twenty-nine bushels of wheat. Also we got vegetables and potatoes enough for the whole winter. At harvest, my husband earned $35.00 so we had money to buy shoes and winter clothes as well as groceries such as sugar, flour, salt, and tea.

Christmas holidays were much happier than the previous ones, we could exchange ten pounds of sugar for a gallon of moonshine or homemade vodka. Invited are neighbors and friends. During the summer we picked some raspberries and made some good wine. Our house is small and the walls are whitewashed. The table is set for eight people. On the table is homemade liquor colored with burned sugar. For the last few days we were getting ready for this occasion. I baked many buns with poppy seeds and then three-cornered buns. I also made cabbage rolls with buckwheat in them. On the table we placed homemade ham, sausage, fried chicken, and beets. My husband is glad to have that many guests and is treating them with vodka or wine. He had to have a drink with everyone and say Merry Christmas. We invited two boys with a violin and a guitar, John and Peter Paziuk. One room, one bed on which children are sleeping. Antoni had too many drinks and went to sleep on the floor, forgetting about our guests. After supper we dance again, polka, waltz, and kozak. John Los keeps stamping the floor in one place until he broke two boards and there was a hole into the cellar. Little Eddy woke up from the noise, began to cry, and came running to me. We looked for a hammer and nails but did not find any. In a situation like that, the guests began to leave. I am saying goodbye to everyone, thanking them for coming to our first party and apologizing for the mishap. There were twenty-two guests.

Being pregnant, I have to go to the village of Wanham and see the District Nurse. January 2, 1938, neighbors are returning their daughter to school in Wanham. I am to wait on the road and meet them there. I walk about a half mile to the road and wait. Outside it is frost and miserably cold. They are not coming so I start to walk. After walking about a mile, I see a building. I go to the door and knock. After a while a woman opened the door for me and upon seeing me, that I am chilled to the bones, she asked me to come in out of the cold. My hands and feet are numb. The lady recognized me and knows that I must live nearby. The people did come and took me into their caboose. This is a small erected home on a floor in one place until he broke two boards and there was a hole into the cellar. Little Eddy woke up from the noise, began to cry, and came running to me. We looked for a hammer and nails but did not find any. In a situation like that, the guests began to leave. I am saying goodbye to everyone, thanking them for coming to our first party and apologizing for the mishap. There were twenty-two guests.

Our house is built out of round logs and plastered on both sides with mud and straw. Inside stands a bed, two benches, and a plank bed where our daughter sleeps. We have a metal kitchen range and a heater. In our home are two windows, one on the north and the other on the south wall. On the north wall is a ladder on which our children climb up to the attic to sleep in a bed laid on the ceiling beams. The roof is covered with boards but it is not very good, when it snows, it comes into the attic.

Returning home, I am sitting on hay in the smoky hut. Got a pain in my back. Arrived home late in the evening. Our friend stopped his horses by the trampled trail made by our children going to school. Everything is white, I can’t see the trail. A few times I wandered off the trail and fell into snow up to the knees. I see a small light in the window of our house. Dogs hear me and then come running through the snow. They are friendly and are jumping to my face. At home, it is warm because of the fire. The children are happy to see their mother who left early in the morning. At home, we keep in secret that there is to come a baby into this world.

January 3, 1938, the two older boys went to school, and the two younger ones are learning at home. At the school, the two younger ones are learning at home.

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Returning home, I am sitting on hay in the smoky hut.
The letter in this October 12, 1944 article is from a bereaved mother in Quebec, writing to the mother of Michael Bzowy, who was mentioned in her son’s diary. It is a moving reminder of war’s far reaching effect, even on strangers, united only by their concern for their sons. The mother in Quebec is hoping to find someone to talk to her about her son; the mother in Rycroft is awaiting news of her son who had appeared in casualty lists.

L.A.C. John Archer R.C.A.F. married Jessamy Smith on August 10, 1942. The wedding took place at the United Church’s Indian Residential School in Edmonton where Jessamy’s father was the farm instructor. Here they are ready to board the train after the wedding. (SPRA 0399.12.27)

John Bzowy (1944)

John Archer was born on August 21, 1918 in Lake Saskatoon to Ruth and Joseph Archer. He grew up in Wembley, and he attended the U of A for one year. On January 8, 1941 he joined the Air Force in Edmonton, and he was posted in various locations in Western Canada.

John married Jessamy Smith on August 10, 1942 in Edmonton, and they lived in Claresholm. In 1943 he was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and his main job was flight instruction, and armament testing. In 1945 he was discharged and he and his wife Jessamy moved to Beaverlodge. In Beaverlodge the Archer’s owned the Marshall-Wells hardware store until 1976. John also served as the mayor for seven years.


John also served as the mayor for seven years.

John died on September 10, 2010 in Victoria, and is buried in Beaverlodge.

Robert Ernest Nelson was born on March 4, 1925 in Grande Prairie and had four brothers; two older and two younger. The Nelson family lived in the Forbes House, a provincial historic site in Grande Prairie, from 1936 to 1947. Ernie’s father, Isaac Nelson, co-owned the Nelson & Archibald General Store where Ernie spent some of his summers working. As a child, he attended Montrose Elementary Public School and then went on to attend the Grande Prairie High School.

At the age of 17, Ernie Nelson (R212423) decided to join the Air Force and trained to become a rear gunner. Once overseas, he had advanced training. He was posted to 429 (Canadian) Squadron, stationed at Leeming, Yorkshire.

Just before leaving on his last operation, on November 20, 1944, Ernie received his promotion to Pilot Officer (J92597). The next day, Halifax #MZ377 left the base in Leeming, England, at 15.46 hours for a raid on Castrop-Rauxel, located in the Ruhr Valley, five miles northwest of Dortmund, Germany. The target was the oil refinery. After climbing to 18,000 feet, they set course, went over London, crossed the channel and French coast. Two minutes from the target, at 19.30 hours, over Langenburg, Germany, they were illuminated by a single searchlight. A night fighter, directly underneath.

Ernie at 17 in 1942 when he joined the Air Force

Ernie, the rear gunner, opened fire and the enemy aircraft, a JU-88, burst into flames above and to starboard. They continued on to the target. After releasing the bombs, the pilot gave the order to bail out. Ernie turned in his seat, opened the door, and jumped out. The aircraft went completely out of control. The port wing dropped off at the root. The pilot, hearing no response from the crew, looked into the nose to see an opened parachute. The crew could not get out. At 400 to 500 feet, the aircraft went onto its back.

The pilot was thrown out and landed less than 50 feet from the plane, badly burned. The plane exploded over a house in Langenburg, Germany and landed in the garden. The house is still standing today, in 2005. The bomber burned fiercely upon impact, killing the remaining crew members trapped inside. Ernie broke a bone in his foot when he landed. He became a Prisoner of War (POW no. 1254) at Stalag Luft VII (Bankau) and remained a POW until the end of the war. Ernie returned to Grande Prairie and died in Edmonton on October 15, 2004.

Ernie in 1944 on the base in Leeming

Ernie in 1945 after he came back to Canada
Corporal Harold Hugh Black

By Kaylee Dyck

At the outbreak of World War I, Canadians eagerly stepped forward to show their support for Britain. In a matter of weeks, more than 32,000 men had amassed at Valcartier, Quebec, and soon the First Contingent, CEF, was headed to England. Some complained that the men in rural areas were not such keen volunteers, although Britain was encouraging the farmers to plant even bigger crops in order to feed both soldiers and civilians, in Britain and Canada alike. But the men of the South Peace did not shirk their military duty in any way. Hundreds of men from the area (which was quite remote at the time) joined the army, and quite a number were killed or left with injuries and memories to haunt them.

Harold Hugh Black was born in Fergus, Ontario in 1891. Along with his brother Hubert John Black, he came to the Peace country in 1913, and they settled in Halcourt. In September of 1915, Harold, Hubert, and their neighbour Gordon Moyer walked more than forty kilometers from their homesteads to Lake Saskatoon to enlist. Out of the three men, only Harry was accepted at the time. Hubert was too slender and Gordon had flat feet (it is interesting that they were declared unfit for service, considering the distance they had just walked); however, both were drafted in the 1917 conscription.

Harry embarked for England on April 28, 1916 and arrived there on May 7. In June, he was transferred from the 66th Battalion to the 31st, and shortly thereafter landed in France. In October he was promoted to Corporal. About a year after his arrival in France, Harold was wounded in the battle during which Lt. John McCrae penned “In Flanders Fields.” In the days preceding the battle, James was digging communication trenches at Polygon Wood, near Ypres. On April 11, he “got a rifle bullet through left thigh, about 8 inches above the knee.” He spent eleven weeks in hospitals in France and England, but the wound had been a severe one and after leaving the hospital James still walked with a limp and experienced pain in his leg. He was discharged from the army and returned to Canada in January of 1916.

But James by no means left army life behind him. He was influential in recruiting for the 257th Railway Construction Battalion. This time he left behind a wife; on March 22, 1917, four days before his departure, James married Nellie Alice Mason in Toronto.

James was a dedicated and courageous officer. On August 16, 1918, he was awarded the Military Cross “For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty at Rosieres on the morning of August 9th, 1918 - This N.C.O. utterly regardless of personal danger, rushed a machine gun post which was holding up his section, killing two of the enemy and making several prisoners. Later was wounded, not being able to reach the post he crawled up close and succeeded in dropping several bombs into the post, putting it out of action, thus allowing his platoon to move forward.” Following this act of bravery, Corporal Black spent about five weeks in the Military Convalescent Hospital at Epsom. The war ended not long after he had recovered, but before returning home he was also briefly posted to a concentration camp in England.

Corporal Harold Black was discharged in London, Ontario on January 30, 1919. He did not arrive in Canada in good health, and as a result of having been severely gassed during the war, he took up residence at the Central Alberta Sanatorium (now Baker Park) in Calgary. Harry died in Calgary on April 10, 1923 at 31 years of age. He is buried in the family plot at Belsyde Cemetery in Fergus, Ontario.

Sources:
- Attestation Paper at Library & Archives Canada
- Canadian Great War Project
- Grave Marker: http://www.findagrove.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GrID=54843821
- Farm or Fight: http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol13/no2/page57-eng.asp
- Numbers: http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/canada/Canada3

Lieutenant James Archibald Foote

By Teresa Dyck

A group of soldiers belonging to the 256th Construction Battalion outside a building in Toronto, March 16, 1917. James Foote is probably one of the soldiers in the picture.

(SPRA 0644.01.02)

James Archibald Foote was born in Perth, Ontario to David and Catherine Foote. His service files show some conflict regarding his date of birth, with his initial Attestation Paper stating July 23, 1880 and subsequent documents stating July 20, 1887. In August of 1914, at the onset of the First World War, James enlisted in the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry and shipped overseas to serve on the Western Front.

The Princess Patricia’s fought at the Second Battle of Ypres, which lasted from April 22 until May 25, 1915. It was the first mass use of German poison gas, and also the battle during which Lt. John McCrae penned “In Flanders Fields.” In the days preceding the battle, James was a dedicated and courageous officer. On August 16, 1918, he was awarded the Military Cross “For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty while engaged in the maintenance of light railways. The area where he was working was subjected to intense shell fire, and the line was broken in six places. He repeatedly reorganised his working parties, who had suffered casualties, and by his example and encouragement kept his men at work under most difficult conditions. By his efforts the line was kept open, and the supply of ammunition was ensured.” When he returned from overseas in 1919, James and Nellie moved to Sexsmith. James passed away in Edmonton on August 14, 1949 and was buried in the Soldiers’ Plot at Beechmount Cemetery.

Sources:
- Service file at Library & Archives Canada
- Canadian Great War Project
- Grande Prairie papers, April 9, 1918 and August 18, 1919
Featured Paper Artifact: Grande Prairie Conservative Association Programme

This programme from the first annual banquet of the Grande Prairie Conservative Association in 1916 was recently donated to the Archives by Doug and Angie Crerar. Perhaps the menu can serve as an inspiration for upcoming holiday feasts, and be sure to read the wise and witty quotations that accompany the toast list.

Peace Country Connections

By Leslie Gordon

When my family and I moved to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories this summer, we missed our home in Grande Prairie. I missed the sense of knowing the history as I wandered the streets and drove in the countryside. During my time at South Peace Regional Archives I had learned so much about the people who went before us in the region and now I was in a new place I didn’t know anything about. That can be an interesting place to be because there is so much to learn and discover. It can also be a lonely place because nothing is familiar. However, the longer I’ve been here in Yellowknife, the more connections I’ve discovered to people of the Peace.

I was delighted to find that several of the characters who played roles in developing the Peace Country had also played roles in Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories. The first one I encountered was J. H. Sissons. Having small children to entertain over the summer, we made the rounds of the local school playgrounds. The first one we visited was at J. H. Sissons School. John Howard Sissons was born in 1892 in Ontario. He attended university at Queens, graduated in 1917, articled in Alberta, and was called to the bar in 1921. He practised law in Grande Prairie and the Peace Country for the next nineteen years and also had a stint as Member of Parliament from 1940 to 1945. In 1955, Sissons became the first judge of the Territorial Court of the Northwest Territories, moving with his wife, Frances, to Yellowknife. He went out on circuit to cover his vast territory, with the court staff and counsel travelling with him by air to various small communities in the Northwest Territories, an estimated 25,000 miles twice per year, plus special trips, as needed. Sissons served as judge until his retirement in 1966.

In my efforts to learn more about my new home and entertain myself over the summer, I got in the habit of picking up free back issues of the magazine Up Here from the tourist information centre. We called in there often not only to supply me with reading material, but also to use the bathrooms, a frequent need for a family with young children visiting playgrounds. One of the Up Here issues I read was on the history of northern aviation. Two of the key players were names familiar to Peace Country aviation: Wop May and Grant McConachie. Wilfred Reid “Wop” May was born in Manitoba in 1896. A famed WWI aviator, involved in the 1918 battle when the Red Baron was shot down, May became a commercial pilot and bush pilot after the war. Wop May was the first pilot to land in Grande Prairie. He brought airplanes north for sports days in Spirit River, Grande Prairie, and Peace River in 1920. After oil was discovered in Norman Wells, Northwest Territories, Wop May was one of the two pilots hired by Imperial Oil to fly planes in from New York. Then, Grande Prairie’s Harry Adair hired May to fly his new airplane up from the United States. The resulting Edmonton and Grande Prairie Aircraft Company was unfortunately short-lived when the heavily loaded plane hit a telephone wire and crashed during takeoff from Grande Prairie. Wop May was also involved in a famous mercy flight to the
north Peace Country in 1929, flying diphtheria antitoxin to Red River, beyond Fort Vermilion, in the dead of winter. The plane had to stop for refuelling in Peace River both there and back. Also in 1929, May obtained the weekly airmail contract for Grande Prairie and the first airmail contract in the Northwest Territories, flying the Mackenzie River air mail route from Fort McMurray to Aklavik. Later, he was transport agent and airport manager. Along with several other bush airlines, Yukon Southern Air Transport was purchased by the CPR in 1941, becoming Canadian Pacific Airlines, with McConachie as general manager of the western lines. It was Canadian Pacific Airlines which built the Yellowknife Airport in 1944. In 1947, McConachie became president of CPA, a position he held until his death in 1965.

Finally, driving into Old Town Yellowknife to deliver my daughter to yet another birthday party, a neighbourhood sign for “Peace River Flats” caught my eye. Knowing that the Peace River runs nowhere near this area, I figured that the name must relate to the people, rather than the geography. An historical plaque erected nearby confirmed my hypothesis. The name originated with the many settlers in that particular area who had come from Peace River during the late 1930s. Yellowknife as a settlement was itself quite new at the time, with the first free (visible) gold having only been found in 1933 and the Con Mine going into production in 1938. Peace River Flats was one of the first settled areas. Drawn by the recent gold discoveries and boomtown hype of Yellowknife even as their own farms were experiencing difficulties due to the economic depression and drought of the Great Depression, the settlers of Peace River Flats travelled 1000 km by boat and barge up the Peace River, up the Slave River to Fort Resolution, and then across Great Slave Lake to Yellowknife. In July 1936, the power scow Beulah, bearing several people, including Harry Weaver, Bud Devore, Mickey Hughes, and Frank Sedore arrived. The Weaver & Devore Trading Ltd. store is still in operation near the site. Other Peace River families followed, making up the majority of the people arriving in Yellowknife in 1937. The Frank Buckley family, whose small collection of photographs is now in the Northwest Territories Archives, lived in the Peace River Flats from 1938 to 1942, before returning to Alberta, though not to Peace River. Their two horses were the first in Yellowknife. From Wembly came John Malcolm MacDonald, Colin McDonald, and Ken Dixon, putting in at the Bezanson ferry on the Smoky River in May 1939 and arriving in Yellowknife in July. These early Yellowknifers certainly had a more adventurous trek north than I.

As a new resident of Yellowknife, missing the Peace Country, it was a delight to find these connections and discover that the links between my new and old homes are stronger than Grande Prairie merely being the destination of choice for Yellowknifers doing their annual Costco shop. I am not the first Peacelander to make the trek north and certainly will not be the last. In fact, the last bag of potatoes I bought from the Co-op here made the journey from the Peace Country itself, having been grown in Eaglesham!

**Sources:**


Buckley Family Collection Finding Aid, Northwest Territories Archives http://www.nwtarchives.ca/finding_aid.asp?

Accession_Number=N-2015-001

Peace River Flats

The promise of gold drew families north in the 1930s and 40s. Many an Alberta farm boy built a barge to float “down north” on the Peace and Slave Rivers and sail across Great Slave Lake to Yellowknife. These settlers were attracted to this flat expanse of land on the shores of Back Bay, and named the area Peace River Flats after their homes back in Alberta. The construction boom of the late 80s is apparent as you walk the streets of Peace River Flats. Few of the original buildings remain, but the neighborhood retains a relaxed atmosphere typical of the Old Town. The Fritz Theil ball park now covers what was once a large and muddy pond, backing on the flats.


Sissons, John H. https://albertaonrecord.ca/sissons-john-h


May, Wop https://albertaonrecord.ca/may-wop


Bush Pilot with a Briefcase, by Ronald A. Keith

Jack McMeeken’s Yellowknife Blade edited and abridged by Gladys McCurdy Gould

Yellowknife, N.W.T. An Illustrated History Edited by Susan Jackson
Bezanson required Mr. Webb and Lake. Soon thereafter, Mr. Webb was located on the shore of Bear Lake and managed the cattle operation that he established on behalf of Mr. Bezanson and purchased Revillon Frere's cattle on the Peace River Trail (1901), Eva (1902), and Harold (1903). Mr. Webb was engaged in a mixed farming operation with his stepfather, Sidney, while proving up his land. Cecil was kept very busy with his homestead requirements and assisting his stepfather with the improvements being made at the Townsite. As reported by the Calgary Herald in 1914, he became the first unofficial postmaster at the Townsite with his stepfather being the mail courier.

Cecil was engaged in a mixed farming operation with his stepfather, Sidney, while proving up his land. Cecil was kept very busy with his homestead requirements and assisting his stepfather with the improvements being made at the Townsite. As reported by the Calgary Herald in 1914, he became the first unofficial postmaster at the Townsite with his stepfather being the mail courier.

In July 1915, Cecil answered the call of duty and enlisted in Edmonton with the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force. He served with the 66th Battalion. His attestation paper listed him as 5' 4 ½” tall with blue eyes and blonde hair. Cecil wrote a letter home, a portion of which was published in the Grande Prairie Herald:

Cecil was never to return home or write another letter. He was killed on September 15, 1915, during the Battle of Passchendaele. His body was never recovered and he is commemorated in the First World War Book of Remembrance.

The Vimy Memorial, which overlooks the Douai Plain from the highest point of Vimy Ridge, is a majestic and inspiring tribute to lives lost, with many bodies never being found. Cecil is commemorated in the First World War Book of Remembrance. Although Cecil's life was cut far too short, he will always be remembered not only as the first postmaster at the Bezanson Townsite, but also for the contributions he made in regard to the development of the Townsite. That being said, what Mr. Evans will be remembered most for on a global level is the greatest sacrifice of all – answering the call of duty to maintain the country's freedom and dying in the effort to do so.

His position as postmaster was officially taken over by W.A. Leonard in December 1915. Cecil's land was inherited by his mother, Elizabeth Webb, with the patent being issued in August 1917.

Cecil Samuel Montague Evans was born in Carleton, Ontario to Samuel Evans (1836) and Elizabeth Lees (1862). Samuel passed away in May 1898, leaving Elizabeth with three small children to raise: Grace (1891), Eva (1901), and Harold (1903). She subsequently married Sydney James Webb in 1899 and they had three children: Ethel (1900), Eva (1902), and Harold (1903). Mr. Webb was engaged in a mixed farming operation when he became interested in the opportunities for land ownership in Northern Alberta after he had read A.M. Bezanson's book, The Peace River Trail.

The Peace River Trail was written about by A.M. Bezanson’s book, The Peace River Trail. As circumstances dictated, Mr. Bezanson was in Ottawa during the winter of 1909/1910 to meet with Dr. William Saunders, who was in charge of the Canadian Experimental Stations. Here he met Sydney Webb and as he was in need of someone to assist him with his cattle operation, A.M. Bezanson and Mr. Webb entered into a partnership. In June of 1910, Mr. Webb left Ontario along with his 16 year old step-son, Cecil, who was also interested in experiencing the “Last Great West” as written about in “Last Great West” as written about by A.M. Bezanson’s book, The Peace River Trail.

Cecil purchased Revillon Frere’s cattle on behalf of Mr. Bezanson and managed the cattle operation that was located on the shore of Bear Lake. Soon thereafter, Mr. Bezanson required Mr. Webb and

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On September 6 we received the following email and accompanying photographs from Cristina Timò, who visited the Archives on August 12, 2016:

Let me first thank you very much for having received me with such a short notice and for having helped me in finding some traces of my family presence in Grande Prairie in 1955.

I am very excited that I could find some information and articles written by my mother and published on the newspaper!

Now we are back in Milano, Italy after a tour through the Rocky Mountains to Vancouver. Very impressive!

I gave a quick look to the photos I have at home and I found these three photos dated February 1955. It seems to be the house where my parents lived in 1955, but unfortunately there is not the name of the street.

I am sending you the ones I have, but I have still to look into other boxes which I have stored in the basement, not reachable very quickly.

As soon as I find something else, interesting for your archives, I’ll be happy to share with you the material and contribute to your project of South Peace Regional Archives.

Thank you very much again and take care.

With gratitude,
Cristina Timò

The photos to the left are of Cristina’s mother inside and beside their home in Grande Prairie. Do you recognise this house and know the address or whether it is still standing? Please call us at 780-830-5105 if you can help.

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Friends of the Archives:

“Raising the Archives” Barn Dance

Thanks to you, it was a great fundraiser and we were able to add over $10,000 to the Archives building fund!

Many thanks to
All our supporters in the sell-out crowd;
Artists Tina Dale, Amos Wiebe, Holly Crichton, Emily Lozeron, Shanda Thiessen, and Jennie Adair, and Auctioneer Tarril Rosvold for a very successful Art Auction;
“Vintage” Band
For their lively dance music;
And everyone who donated for Door Prizes and the amazing Silent Auction:
Barb & Ian Campbell
Beaverlodge Cultural Centre
Quilter Karen Burgess
Canada Post
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Prairie Coast Equipment Ltd
Cathy Scott
MP Chris Warkentin
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Windsor Motors

Thanks for supporting a new Archives facility for the South Peace!

Photos by Amos Wiebe of Famous Amos Photography
New at the Archives

Thank You Donors!
The holdings at SPRA have all been donated by individuals, organizations, and municipal governments. You are our only resource for the preservation of the history of the South Peace.

Here are a few of our recent donations:
- Postcards from the Jack Soars collection, 1925-1980
  By Gail Frey
- Gordon & Edna Moyer fonds accrual, 1920-1960
  By Alice Lewis
- Spirit River Immigration Hall Register, 1917-1930
  By Spirit River Museum
- Montrose Junior High School Yearbooks, 1968-1969
  By Gordon Mackey
- Gordon & Anne Donaldson accrual, 1940-2013
  By Greg Donaldson
- 1968 Aerial Photograph of Grande Prairie
  By Marg Johns
- Photos & Artifacts from the Crerar family, 1915-1940
  By Doug & Angie Crerar
- Premier’s Prayer Breakfast Tape & Documents, 1970
  By Oswald Throness
- Unchaga Area Scouts Documents, 1956-2000
  By Gail Schau
- Adam Tolway Photographs
  By Mary Fowler
- Henry and Charles Kirkness Family Papers, 1905-2006
  By Melanie Moore
- Laurence & Marguerite Thompson family papers
  By Marie Brand

Grace Wideman presents a cheque for $5,500 from the Hythe Homecoming Committee 2016 to SPRA President Jan Shields at the September Board Mtg. The cheque represents a Thank You from the Homecoming Committee for the assistance of Archives staff in finding photographs and research material to celebrate the history of Hythe.

South Peace Regional Archives Society
Membership Application/Renewal Form

Date: ____________________________

Name: __________________________________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________________________
Postal Code: __________________________ Phone: _________________________________
E-mail: ____________________________________________________________________________

Interested in being involved as a:  __________ volunteer  __________ board member

There are two types of membership:
Full membership--get involved in the society, attend meetings, vote on issues and run for office.
Associate membership--receive communications (like this newsletter) to stay informed about issues and happenings at the Archives.

This membership is  ________ new ________ renewal

Full Membership
$20.00/person or $30.00/couple

Associate Member
$15.00/person

I wish to donate to the South Peace Regional Archives

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