

THANK YOU FOR
SUPPORTING

SOUTH PEACE REGIONAL ARCHIVES

PLEASE VISIT US AT

WWW.SOUTHPACEARCHIVES.ORG



THE MANDATE OF SPRA IS TO GATHER, PRESERVE, AND SHARE THE HISTORICAL RECORDS OF MUNICIPALITIES, ORGANIZATIONS, BUSINESSES, FAMILIES, AND INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THE REGION. BOTH NOW AND IN THE FUTURE. THESE RECORDS REFLECT THE PERSONAL, CULTURAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL LIFE OF THE SOUTH PEACE RIVER COUNTRY OF ALBERTA AND ARE IN ALL FORMATS AND MEDIA, INCLUDING TEXTUAL RECORDS, MAPS, PLANS, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES, FILM, VIDEO, SOUND RECORDINGS.

ESTABLISHED IN 2000, THE FIRST REGIONAL ARCHIVES IN ALBERTA.

TELLING OUR STORIES

LOCAL HISTORY

ARCHIVE NEWS



VOLUME 5 SEPTEMBER 1, 2014 ISSUE 4

PRODUCED BY
SOUTH PEACE REGIONAL ARCHIVES

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 _____

Total Membership and Donation _____

Please pay by cash or cheque to
South Peace Regional Archives Society
Box 687, Grande Prairie, AB. T8V 3A8
Phone: 780-830-5105
Fax: 780-831-7371
E-mail: spra@telus.net

New at the Archives

Thank You Donors!

The collections 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.

Alexander Family fonds (Spirit River)
by Jean Pearce

Sub-division and Infrastructure Plans
by City of Grande Prairie

Medlock-Evenrude Family fonds
by Kathryn Auger

Lassiter Project Crop Failures Register
by Wayne Grusie & Grizzly Bear Prairie Museum

Foulest of Murders Book & Research Files
by Doris Tansem and Brenda LaCroix

City Staff Photos and Miss Grande Prairie publications
by Bernice Penson

William Noll Diary
by Chris Kinderwater

Hudson’s Bay Store & Staff Photographs
by Harold (Hal) Tipper

Hythe Welding Shop records
by Irene McCallister

South Peace Regional Archives

is funded by
City of Grande Prairie, County of Grande Prairie,
MD of Greenview, MD of Spirit River
grants from the Archives Society
and the Province of Alberta
and donations from people like you!

New in the Archives Library

Dunvegan Post Journals for 1806 and 1808

[a transcription of] an account of the Activities at the Post as recorded by Alexander Roderick McLeod. (Includes a site plan of the Post.)

Edited by David W. Leonard

Available in the Grande Prairie
Museum Book Store for \$10.00

The Perfect Introduction

If you hear someone say: I have some time now that I’m retired, and I’d like to volunteer at the Archives, but I don’t know very much about Archives and my family has very little history in the area.

You can tell them: Volunteering at the Archives is all about making information available to the public. There are lots of things you can do, like researching people’s stories, or transcribing and typing, even helping get the newsletter out. Archives staff will give you any training you need.

Are You Enjoying This Newsletter?

Would you like to receive it mailed to your home four times a year? It’s free when you are a member of the South Peace Regional Archives Society or Friends of South Peace Regional Archives. See the Membership Form on the back of the newsletter. You can also give memberships as gifts to friends or family.

Submissions to this Newsletter

SPRA Society encourages submissions in the form of stories, poems, memories, letters and photographs. Do you have a story, or does someone you know have a story about the past in the south Peace? Submit it to us by mail or e-mail, or call us at 780-830-5105.

Inside This Issue:

Take Note Announcements	p. 3
Letter from the Editor	p. 4
Contact Information	p. 4
First Annual Fundraiser	p. 5
Proposal for a New Archives	p. 6-7
South Wapiti collection	p. 8-9
The “Chicken Coop” Schools	
By Phyllis Stewart	p. 10-11
Explore the History of DeBolt –Ridgevalley	p. 12-15
World War I, William Noll Diary	p. 16
Grande Prairie River Rats Association	p. 17
By Dorman Ditch	
Sargent Family Photographs	p. 18-19
Mourning St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, Rio Grande	
By Astride Wenigeren-Nova	p. 20-21
Memories of Not So Long Ago	
By Christine Dyck	p. 21-22
Kathryn’s Picks	p. 22
What Archives Do and Why We Do It	
by Leslie Gordon	p. 23-25
New at the Archives	p. 26
New in the Archives Library	
The Perfect Introduction	p. 26
Membership Application Form	p. 27

On the Front Cover: From the Sargent Family fonds, Morrison & Sargent's truck in front of the Hudson's Bay Company store at Sturgeon Lake. The label on the front of the photo says, "Freighting into Hudson's Bay Store." (SPRA 2013.086.26) For more images from the Sargent Family photograph collection, see pp. 18-19.

Take Note

Friends of SPRA
Fundraiser

Saturday, October 11, 2014 (see page 5)

Film & Story Tea

Sunday, October 5, 2014

From 2:00-4:00 p.m.

At the Grande Prairie Golden Age Center
10222-101 Avenue, Grande Prairie

Featuring Vintage 16 mm Film from 1981
“Grande Prairie, A Way of Life”
Shown courtesy of Ken Jubenvill

Also Storytellers on the Funny Side of Politics and
Government Services
And a display of Archival Photographs



Sponsored by the
City of Grande
Prairie
100th Anniversary
Committee

Admission is Free

September 1, 2014

Dear Members and Supporters;

To this, our 20th issue of “Telling Our Stories,” we welcome a new readership—members in the new Friends of South Peace Regional Archives Society. Friends, please consider this your voice as well as ours, and feel free to suggest topics and make submissions.

This issue has two themes: the Municipal District of Greenview, our featured municipality, and the need for a larger facility for the Archives.

I feel I should apologize to the greater part of Greenview; for the second time in featuring this municipal district, it is mostly about the area around DeBolt. I do like to use the material that our readers submit and so I thank Phyllis Stewart, Fran Moore, Norm Dyck, Sean Sargent and Bunny Schenk for the material they donated or wrote for us. In the future I hope we will see more submissions from other parts of Greenview and be able to feature them.

As for the new Archives—we have tried to demonstrate why we need a new facility and what it would contain (p. 23-25), included our proposal to re-create the old Montrose School (p. 6-7), and advertised our first fundraiser (p. 5).

The time has come to start raising funds for a new Archives. In order for this project to be supported by the various levels of government, we need to demonstrate public support, and so we truly hope you will take part.

Tickets are \$100/plate, but you get a tax receipt for the amount above the cost, which is about \$35.00/plate (so a tax receipt for \$65.00/plate). There are only 160 tickets available and 50 are already gone. If you want tickets, or a whole table (10 seats) for you and your friends, let me know ASAP so that I can reserve those for you.

Thank you for being faithfull supporters and readers of this newsletter over the past five years.

Sincerely, Mary Nutting, Editor

TELLING OUR STORIES

PUBLISHED BY
South Peace Regional Archives Society

PRESIDENT VICE PRESIDENT
Lane Borstad Gord Mackey

SECRETARY TREASURER
Jan Shields Gail Prette

PAST PRESIDENT
Irene Nicolson

DIRECTORS
Rory Tarant, City of Grande Prairie
Peter Harris, County of Grande Prairie
Roxie Rutt, M.D. of Greenview
Stan Bzowy, M.D. of Spirit River
Douglas Frattini, Director
Beth Sande, Director
Daryl White, Director
Eleanor Dalen Whitling, Director

MAILING ADDRESS
South Peace Regional Archives
Box 687, Grande Prairie, AB
T8V 3A8

Telephone: 780-830-5105
E-mail: spra@telus.net
www.southpeacearchives.org

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.



Why do we need a new facility? Clockwise from top left, because we are spilling out into the hall, every nook is filled with records to be processed, our storage area is nearing capacity, and our researchers have only a small space in the middle of a busy and distracting office. Not that we’re complaining—all those donated records make us an excellent resource, and the reason we exist!

estate, Sexsmith Museum, and the Grande Prairie Public Library in the last year alone, plus more than 50 smaller accessions since January, all of which will need storage space once they are processed. We also hope to add more municipal partners in the future, which will further stretch our storage capabilities. Besides being much larger, our new storage room also needs to be away from outside walls, water pipes, and public areas, as well as have an adequate floor load. By itself, paper is heavy and we also have high-density storage equipment and strategies (like rolling shelving) designed to maximize use of the storage area. All of this means that the storage area needs to have a much higher floor-load rating than the average office building. We also need a



computer/server room for storage of digital material, which is ever increasing as we continue to digitize analogue holdings and accession born-digital records.

We would like a board room. We currently make use of the

Museum’s Community Room for our meetings, but if we moved, we would need to have a space of our own for Board and Friends meetings. The space could also be used to host school programs and workshops, increasing our visibility in the community and helping us reach groups we currently can’t accommodate.

We would like an exhibit and giftshop area. At the current time, the Museum kindly lets us use wall space and one visual-storage



display case to show some of our holdings. In our own facility, we would want to be able to continue creating displays using our material, sharing tidbits of the region’s history, and providing browsing opportunities for those not into “serious research.” We also have a number of publications produced by the Archives, which we would like to be able to better display and sell to interested patrons.

I’m truly not complaining (well, maybe a little) about our current facility, but it is nice to dream about what might be possible for SPRA in the future. The Grande Prairie Museum has been an excellent place to begin life as an Archives. We have enjoyed an excellent relationship with them for the past 15 years, however, like a growing teenager, we are getting ready to leave the nest and move out on our own. (But only if we can be guaranteed a new archives building with conditions in no way resembling the archives visited by Gandalf!)

processing room. There is no privacy for staff or researchers and things are constantly having to be shifted to make room for more people and their projects. An office for the Executive Director would be a place where she could meet with donors, board members, staff, and others without disrupting the overall workflow of the institution and providing privacy for herself and the people she is meeting with. Let's be honest, no one is comfortable having a job interview, performance review, or sensitive conversation in a place where you can be easily overheard by any number of volunteers, other staff members, members of the public doing research, etc.

We need a processing room. This is where the majority of the staff would be accommodated. There would be table space available so projects in progress could be spread out and worked on for as long as necessary. The tables would be large enough to accommodate big, oversized maps and plans and build custom boxes for them. The room could be lined with supply shelves. There would also be several computer workstations, enough for staff and volunteers. There would be a digitization station to help meet the growing expectations of large amounts of online content. Our current arrangements frequently give researchers the impression that they are interrupting us and getting in the way. Plus they have to be exposed to our work stations, complete with the projects in-progress clutter that results from a productive office. The current overlap between public and private areas leaves us looking less professional than we would like.

We need a properly equipped conservation lab with a fumehood. It would be so nice to be able to deal with mould, mouse droppings, and other hazards immediately, without having to wait for a nice summer day without too much wind to do it outside. I do like attention, but creating a show for passing motorists while decked out in respirator, lab coat, gloves, safety glasses, etc. is not my idea of a good time. Plus, the days when the weather is nice enough are usually also the days which are much too hot for the outfit to be comfortable. There would also be a humidification and flattening station in the lab. Right now we humidify documents in the processing room/Mary's office and the only area large enough that we can dedicate to

flattening is in the storage room. This is less than ideal since the humidified documents release their excess water vapour into the air, thus increasing the overall humidity, which is bad for the rest of the materials in the storage room.

We need a receiving room and unprocessed storage area. We currently have a tiny isolation room off of the Museum's loading bay. We would still need an isolation room for new accessions with problems (mould, droppings, pests, etc.), but having more space to house the materials that have just come in would be great. A couple of years ago we got a grant to turn part of our processing room/Mary's office into unprocessed records storage by installing rolling shelving. Although it greatly increased our capacity, we are in desperate need of more space again. The receiving room would also be the area where donors could drop off records. Right now, donations are dealt with on the reference room/processing tables, occasionally causing conversations like this: "Mr. Researcher, would you mind moving over again? Oh, and sorry about the noise – this shouldn't take too long." A loading bay with room to accept large collections would also be great.

We need a large storage room with an HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) system. Our current storage is alright, but it could be better. We have no heat or air-conditioning running to the storage room, which allows the natural conditions to prevail. This means that we experience drops in temperature and humidity through the winter and rises and intertemperature and humidity through the summer. We aren't terribly concerned because the levels change very gradually and do not reach the danger levels, but the records would be happiest if we were able to keep them at a constant temperature and humidity throughout the year. An overall lower temperature and humidity would decrease our current rating from a moderate aging rate to a slow aging rate, thus increasing our ability to preserve the records for longer. The records storage area would also benefit from air exchange, which currently only occurs when we open and close the door. We will also soon be experiencing space shortages in our storage room. We acquired three large collections from the Paul Pivert



Who? Friends of the South Peace Regional Archives Society

When? Doors Open 6:00 p.m., Saturday, October 11th, 2014

(yes, we know that's Thanksgiving Weekend—this could be your Thanksgiving!)

Where? The Grande Prairie Elks Hall at 10806-106th Street

What? A Fall Supper and Some Good Fun

We offer you delicious food, hilarious entertainment, exquisite silent auction items, historic décor, a cozy atmosphere for visiting, and the opportunity to support a New Archives Facility (see over page)

Tickets @ \$100/person or Purchase a Whole Table (10 Seats) for your Friends

Call the Archives (780) 830-5105 or email spra@telus.net

Why? To Build Awareness for Friends of the Archives and Kickstart the Fund!

Theme: 100 Years of Our History

Historic Dress is Encouraged—It's All Part of the Fun!

Proposal for a New Archives Facility

In June 2014, the SPRA Board and the Friends of SPRA submitted a proposal to City Council and Administration for a site near the Montrose Cultural Centre where our Society would reconstruct a replica of the old Montrose School to serve as an Archives building. The building would ideally be placed close to its original position on the corner of 101 Avenue and 99 Street and near the 1929 Grande Prairie High School (now the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie) and the Montrose Cultural Centre).

Montrose School, designed by Charles Spencer, was built in 1917 on a portion of Rev. Alexander Forbes’ homestead and named for Mrs. Forbes’ hometown in Scotland. The school had four classrooms and a library and cost about \$8,000 to build. The addition, essentially doubling its size, was constructed in 1922 for approximately \$15,000. Reports of the day claimed it was the largest building north of Edmonton. Now the school boasted eight classrooms (elementary to high school), a science lab, a library, and an assembly hall.

The School eventually became an elementary-only school and continued operating until about 1970, by which time the 1929 High School and Montrose Junior High School were already located on the same site. The old school building was finally demolished in about 1972.



Above: Montrose School under construction, July 31, 1917. (SPRA 024.01.08.04)



Right: Students and teachers on the front steps of Montrose School on the first day, November 26, 1917. (SPRA 2001.01.110)

What Archives Do and Why We Do It

by Leslie Gordon, B Sc, MAS

Author’s Note: South Peace Regional Archives recently submitted a proposal to City Council and Administration to reconstruct a replica of the old Montrose School building to serve as an Archives building. The building would ideally be placed close to its original position on the corner of 101 Avenue and 99 Street and near the 1929 Grande Prairie High School (now the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie) and the Montrose Cultural Centre. So, what does a professional archives building require?

I was watching *The Lord of the Rings* with my husband the other day. I enjoy the movie, but there is always one part that makes me cringe. Surprisingly enough, it’s not when the characters are involved in epic battles but rather when the wizard Gandalf makes a visit to the archives. The archives are presented as a dusty place filled with precarious piles of papers and books and very little room in which to work. There seems to be no one to provide research assistance or supervision of the researcher, in this case, Gandalf, who smokes and drinks while visiting, folds priceless documents, uses an open candle, etc. The only good thing about this archives appears to be that Gandalf leaves with the information he needed. I’m left thinking, “Is that what the public thinks of us? Is that what an archives is supposed to be like?”

As SPRA considers planning and building a new facility, we’ve pondered and researched the kind of archives we would like to construct and I have to say that the vision is (thankfully) very different from the conditions shown by Hollywood.

First, let’s consider the location of a new facility. We need a place that is (ideally) away from natural sources of water (ie. Bear Creek), hazardous materials, industrial, and agricultural facilities, airport flight paths, multi-lane highways, and railroad tracks. We want a place that will be accessible by road and

public transit with room for parking and a loading bay. Wherever we locate, having our own building will allow us to be more visible, with our own, separate identity. In our current location, we are easily confused with Museum, resulting in a lack of understanding about what we do.

Second, let’s consider the overall building. It needs to be sturdy, well-insulated, above ground-level, and able to be properly secured to guard against theft and vandalism. The surrounding landscaping needs to promote good drainage away from the building and allow wheelchair access. We also hope for a sloped roof. Flat roofs have all sorts of problems, especially with drainage and snow load. Many of you will recall the flood we had last Christmas in our office area.

Moving inside the building, let’s consider the kinds of spaces an archives facility should include. We need a reference room. This is the place where researchers come to use the records and material we have preserved. They need things like a large table to review oversized maps and documents, research computers to view digitized material and online databases, and power outlets to plug in their laptops. The reading room should have several tables to comfortably accommodate several researchers at a time and allow them some privacy. If you’ve visited us recently, you have probably noticed us playing a game called “musical tables” in which we move piles of our own work out of the way and squish the first researcher and their stuff into a smaller space (still at the same table) to accommodate someone else. The reading room would also have space for the reference library, clippings files, and other resources the public can browse at their own convenience.

We need separate offices for the staff, particularly the executive director. At the current time, our “offices” triple as offices, reference room, and

Kathryn's Picks

By Kathryn Auger

Right up to the end of the 1960s, Grande Prairie newspapers had “correspondents” who sent in the news from the rural areas. Often the “news” included personal bits about individuals and families as well as community facilities and organizations. Obviously, the Little Smoky correspondent, whose February 16, 1934 column appears on the left, wanted a challenge.

Memories of Not So Long Ago (cont'd from page 21)

I remember our old treehouse which we tore down with visions of a more grand one—one that is still just a vision. Still, there are the stairs to our treehouse awaiting their mansion and us children to play.

I remember running out in my new dress with huge rubber boots smacking against my bare legs to meet my dad coming in from the field. I felt like a princess and this was my palace.

I recall making snow angels throughout the yard with my friends, and rolling up snowmen in the bitter cold winters.

I remember watching the school bus come and go for my older brothers, then, eventually, my brothers beating me to the end of the driveway where we would wait. Waiting was never boring. We could listen to the birds or watch the sun rising (in the winter months) or throw stones over the telephone wire across the road. My brothers always excelled at that game.

We built a big shop and left our names and the date in the cement to remind us, or whoever would be here, eternally.

The spring always brings me to reminisce of our herd of cattle and watching the numerous births of playful calves. In the very cold weather, it was not rare but truly exciting for me, to have a baby calf, near frozen, brought into the house to be “thawed” in the bathtub.

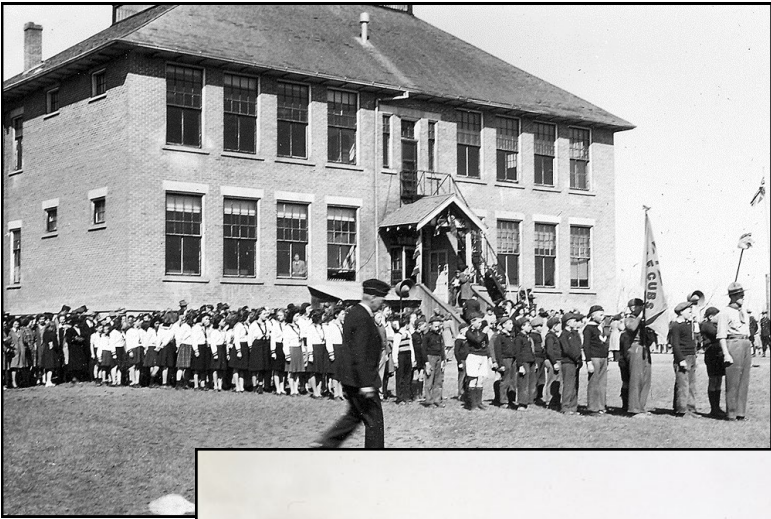
The fall was a time of chicken butchering. It was this that I ran from—decapitated chickens twitching revoltingly.

Holidays were always fun as a child, but coming home was best. Every bit closer, my surroundings became more and more familiar—the swing of the porch door, the comfort of my old “swayback” bed. The yard surrounded by towering trees was more than comforting.

This was my world. These are my most vivid memories of the place I was raised. This place of peace, vastness, hard times, adventures, and love.



Above, Artist's rendering of the proposed building, 2014. (By Lane Borstad)



Left, V-E Day Parade, May 8, 1945 with CGIT, Cubs, Scouts, and others assembling behind Montrose School. (SPRA 399.11.27)



Below, Grande Prairie's tennis courts across from Montrose School, [ca. 1940]. (SPRA 2014.024.02)

Featured fonds: South Wapiti Collection

Editor’s Note: Most of the fonds we feature in this section of the newsletter are large collections with documents and photographs. This is a small collection—only 15 photographs—but it tells the story of the South Wapiti Community.

South Wapiti collection. — 1943-1976. —15 photographs.

The South Wapiti area centered on Township 79, Range 8, West of the 6th meridian. It was opened for agriculture in the early 1930s, with settlers crossing the Wapiti River by boat at Pipestone Creek. A post office was started in Mr. Riggs’ house, and soon there was a ferry over the river. The first community building was the South Wapiti School (District No. 4623), built in 1935. It was the meeting center for clubs, organizations, and church as well as the school. When the Riggs left in 1940, Archie Gerow took over the post office and added a small store. In 1952, a hall was built on Ted Day's quarter, SE 17-69-8-W6, which became a venue for wedding dances and community events. As transportation became easier, the settlers could go to Grovedale or Pipestone Creek for the

goods and services they needed. The store and post office were the first to close, with the school following in 1962 and the hall around 1964.

The photographs were preserved by Melba (Bunny) Day Schenk, daughter of Ted Day and grand-daughter of Olaf Berg. They were deposited with South Peace Regional Archives in 2006.

The Day family arrived in South Wapiti in 1942 to take over the farm from Grandfather Olaf Berg. They travelled from Flin Flon, Manitoba, to Wembley, then south over the Wapiti River at Pipestone Creek. The children went to South Wapiti School.

The collection consists of 15 photographs of the families who lived in or around South Wapiti, including the South Wapiti School children, Olaf Berg, the Day, Osborne, McCullough and Ryan families, transportation photos including horses, wagons and cars. There is also a photo of the McCullough sawmill and "The Bee Man" from the Beaverlodge Research Station giving a demonstration on bee keeping for the South Wapiti Community.



George Hedley Day (Ted), his wife Anna, daughter Melba (Bunny) and Grandpa Berg beside their car at South Wapiti. (SPRA 255.06)

This year the building was not salvageable anymore, and the cemetery needed space for new graves. The old building had to go.

For me it was different. I never really did see an old shack. With my inner eye I would capture the young O’Connell couple freshly married in the UK, trying to embark on a ship to take them to the New World. I see them turned away because something was not correct with their marriage licence. I see them with their hearts filled with thankfulness to God after they found out the ship, named the Titanic, went down to a watery grave. No wonder they gladly helped with building the very first Catholic Church in the middle of nowhere called Rio Grande—what a splendid name! I see little girls in white for their first communion, young O’Connells learning to drive the buggy or a sleigh on the way to Church...

So, I will miss the log building. But then, I am old and would like to be buried at St. Patrick’s cemetery, so I’ll need the ground... St. Patrick’s congregation of the last six faithful is now residing in a third, sleek, modern building.

After all the O’Connell altar boys served their turns, they moved away, except for Daniel O’Connell, his wife Cathy and their three boys. And guess who is taking weekly care of the Church grounds? Yes, it started with the O’Connells and they are still at it.

As I am writing this in the beginning of July, hundreds of peonies, planted by Father Skulaba and Mr. Walker are blooming around our Church. So stop in on Saturday or Sunday for a Mass. When you hear the bell of Rio Grande, it is just five minutes from hearing the organ and the beginning of a Mass.

See you there and God bless you all!

Memories of Not So Long Ago by Christine Dyck

The following article appeared in the January 28, 1993 Western People magazine published by the Western Producer. It was written by 16 year old Christine Dyck about her parents’ farm in the Puskwaskau District north of DeBolt and is reprinted here by permission.

I would slip my feet into my daddy’s shoes and slop cautiously down the enormous front porch steps. Holding my feet just so, to prevent them from falling out of the over-sized shoes, I walked over the cracked cement walk. Our sidewalk always had grass creeping through wherever it could. Benji, our dog, who I hated passionately, would jump up on my flowered dress and cover me with dirty paw prints, and sometimes knock me over.

I passed over the large, muddy yard to the shack we called the “Bee House” where my grandfather stayed. This Bee-house was where Granddad and I would chat and drink tea during those long summer visits he would spend. His dog, Peppy, would nip and yap at my ankles. Granddad, who was hard of hearing, would curse and mumble to himself in this old building about the war. How I wish he was here once again to hear him grump, but mostly to have him laugh and call me “Miss No”. I clearly remember sitting under the trees around the garden with Granddad, podding peas. (cont’d on page 22)

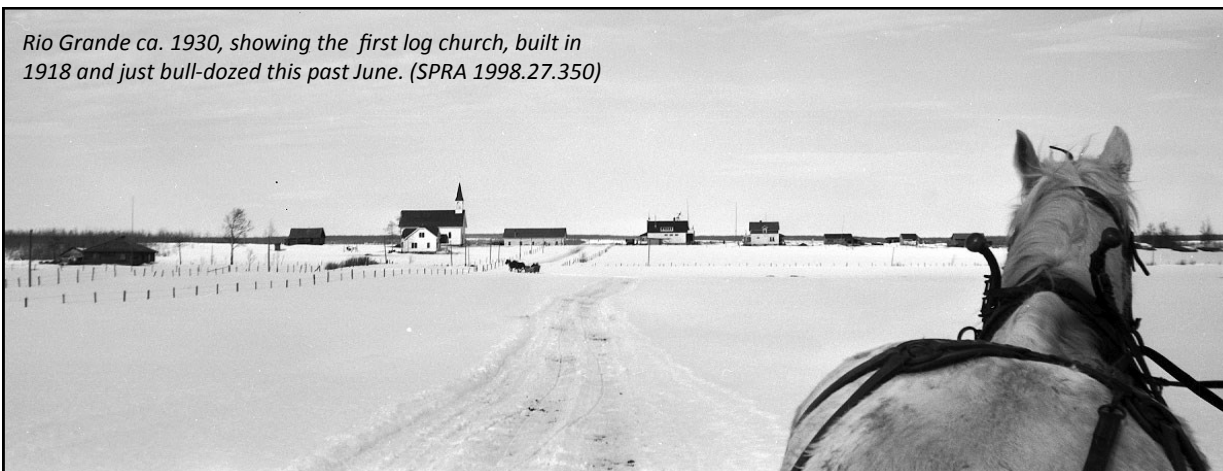


Aerial of Norm and Marg Dyck’s Puskwaskau farm where Christine was raised. (SPRA 2014.036.21)

Mourning St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Rio Grande

by Astride Wenigerova-Noga

Rio Grande ca. 1930, showing the first log church, built in 1918 and just bull-dozed this past June. (SPRA 1998.27.350)



The original St. Patrick's Catholic Church of Rio Grande is no more... Three years short of becoming a centenarian, the original log building of St. Patrick's was bulldozed down this past June.

Pity, because another Pioneer went to the graveyard. Built in the winter of 1917-1918 with the background of the Rockies, the humble log building (really a log shack for any recent pass-byers) was dear to Rio Grande Pioneers.

On June 18th, 1918, the famous Bishop Grouard, with Father Wagner, blessed the Church. Many native people and Metis were in attendance. The guests of honour were baby twins Margaret and Frank O'Connell, baptized that memorable day.

The Church served well the native population; not many white settlers were around at its birth—it was truly a missionary Church from the beginning. The first white couple married at the Church were James O'Connell and Irene Cook in 1921.

On the photograph you see a nice white Church with a steeple. That is the second St. Patrick's Church, built in 1929. The small gray log building to

the left is the original Church. Remember there were almost no roads, no building material, no Canadian Tire. Neighbours with strong horses came to help. You would see a good Anglican George White with his horses pulling together with O'Connell's horses...

A Church, any Church, was a very important part of pioneer settlements. They legally confirmed you were born, married, buried. Not only that—it was a gathering place. In the picture, from the time of the horse and wagon you can see people driving to Church for spiritual food and also for fellowship of a human kind. No Facebook then, no good roads, and almost no cars. Yet the Cooks, Quinns, O'Connells, Sawchucks, Callious, Horsemans, and others whose names I am not familiar with were happy to have a church.

For the postwar immigrants from Europe, the old log shack had no meaning. So when Mrs. Gail Yacklin came in the 1990s with an idea to restore the historical building, it was too late. There was no support for her project, the pioneers being buried in St. Pat's cemetery or living in Nursing Homes.



Students from South Wapiti School on horseback in the school yard. L-R: Irene and Gladys Ryan, Joan Elliott, Irene and Doug Van Schaick, Walter and Bob Ryan, May and Ruth Ryan, Patricia Van Schaick, Muriel Sutherland, Michael and Gerald Ryan. (SPRA 255.02)



Mr. Day with wagon and horses in the home farmyard. The house was built by Ole Berg in the 1930s. George and Leola Day are in the wagon and Bunny Day is in the doorway. (SPRA 255.04)



A group of South Wapiti residents listen to a demonstration on bee keeping given by men from the Beaverlodge experimental station. (SPRA 255.08)

Chicken Coop Schools

By Phyllis Stewart

Editor's note: Phyllis Stewart was a long-time teacher in the East Smoky School Division. This article is about the "Chicken Coop" Schools which were built in that area to address the need for better school buildings for school districts which would soon be centralized.

J.R. Stan Hambly was hired as Superintendent of Schools for Grande Prairie School Division #14 in the fall of 1947 to replace C.B. Johnson. Under some previous arrangement he also served in a similar role for what was called East Smoky School Division #54.

One room schools were not as numerous east of the Smoky River as in the Grande Prairie Division since a greater area of land west of the Smoky had been settled years ahead.

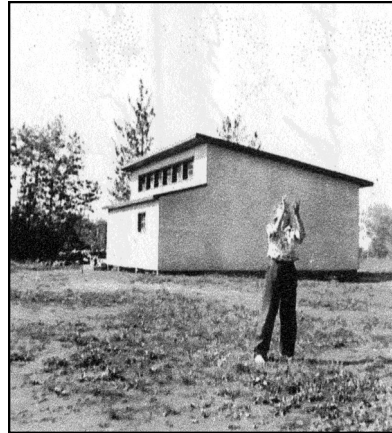
Roads and weather did not help the school "inspectors" to carry out their jobs: the annual visit to each center of learning, but they did their work thoroughly, signing each school register when they paid their visit, filing a report on the operation of the school and its teacher.

A copy of the report (to which the teacher had no input) included the good and bad, suggestions for improvement, criticism of the operation, the activities, the buildings and the supplies. Often the report was equally hard on the employer as well.

In the years following the end of World War II, the state the schools were in showed how money and manpower had gone toward the war effort with education left needy and unattended in many ways. Buildings were run down, classes were often correspondence lessons supervised by teenaged girls with only grade 8 or 9 for qualifications.

The original schools had often been any available shed, barn or homestead residence, whatever a 4 mile by 4 mile school district could manage, renovate, modernize, or replace so that it was

sufficient in which to offer lessons. The government's offer of \$50.00 startup allowance towards the birth of a country school required much from parents in taxes (which few could afford), volunteer labour and donations from local saw mills.



East Smoky School, a typical "chicken coop" school in the East Smoky School Division. Photo courtesy of Irene Riding.

By the early 1950s, many farmers did not want to board a teacher, so at the same time as a district required renovated buildings for schools, there was a need for bigger horse barns, teacherages, and the almost annual need to move or build two outdoor toilets.

The solution was "Chicken coop schools" which would serve as individual classrooms in a consolidated school. I had never seen them in any other area. The chicken-coop school (an endearing name given to a very practical solution) was the brainchild of J.R. Hambly, an answer to the needs of the day and vision for the many tomorrows.

Mr. Hambly would have understood the poverty of this country as well as the determination to get education for the children. He sensed that as new districts sprouted with their needs, other areas were closing schools, consolidating classes and finding ways to transport students.

The new schools were elongated, wide granaries with only half of the building completed. Mills were now



From top left, Bill Sargent beside Ivan Morrison's car at the Harper Creek homestead ca. 1940 , "Hauling logs with a new truck" ca. 1942; the first bus used by Morrison & Sargent to take people from DeBolt to Grande Prairie in 1943; Morrison & Sargent Bus Depot in DeBolt, with Ken, Clara and Fay Sargent beside the bus ca. 1945; the Grande Prairie depot behind Porteous Hardware; and Sargent Sales & Service center on the corner of 100th Street and 99th Avenue in Grande Prairie in 1955. All photos are from the Sargent collection at SPRA.

Sargent Family Photographs

Such interesting stories begin in our rural communities. Bill Sargent started his career in the Peace Country on a homestead at Harper Creek, east of DeBolt. In the late 1930s, he hired on as a mail hauler from Grande Prairie to Calais (Sturgeon Lake), and was soon driving truck for Morrison's Cash Store in DeBolt hauling wheat, livestock and freight. In 1940 they formed a firm named "Morrison and Sargent" and got the mail contract.

The Sargent family story on pages 194-202 in [Across the Smoky](#) tells us, "As times began to get better, more and more homesteaders and their wives started going to Grande Prairie. The times weren't good enough for people to afford cars so the mail truck provided their means of transportation."

In fact, so many people were using the mail truck that Bill Sargent proposed that Morrison and Sargent start a bus service between Valleyview and Grande Prairie. They applied to the Highway Traffic Board in Edmonton and were granted the franchise, the first bus operation in the Peace River Country. They purchased a 1940 Ford, 29 passenger bus. It was an immediate success.

Meanwhile, they were also operating "three International trucks hauling mail, express, groceries, hardware, grain, livestock, lumber, logs, and anything else that needed moving."

In 1946, the bus service was sold to Canadian Coachways Ltd. and the Sargent family built "Sargent Sales & Service" garage on the corner of 99th Avenue and 100th Street in Grande Prairie, which in 1952 became the General Motors franchise. This in turn expanded to Ken Sargent GMC Buick and Sean Sargent Toyota.



Bill and Clara Sargent's log house on the homestead at Harper Creek, ca. 1940 (SPRA 2013.086.32).



Above, Clara Sargent on the tractor pulling a small John Deere combine ca. 1940 (SPRA 2013.086.08). Below, Esther Duerksen at one end of the aerial ferry over Smoky River ca. 1940 (SPRA 2013.086.21).



Above, the "chicken coop" school at Rivertop School district on the west side of the Smoky River. (SPRA 2009.23.15)

planing lumber, and carpenters were more exacting.

Where the peak of the roof was the high half of the school, windows were installed to allow for ventilation above classroom level, smaller in size but able to be opened at the top with a long-handled tool. Larger windows were on the shorter side of the classrooms.

There were two doors, one at one end of the classroom for entry, with a cloak room, as well as supply and library shelves. The other was a smaller door at the opposite end convenient for a caretaker to bring in a load of wood, coal or water supply.

Before the school was moved, the caretaker was the teacher or a student, but following consolidation a caretaker often came during class time to replenish supplies.

The consolidation of these schools and consequent bussing of students sometimes happened only one year after a new school was built. Put together, the two high sides of the individual schools faced each other and between the classrooms there was a long hallway.

When six or eight of these one rooms were fitted together there usually followed a gymnasium, office spaces and washrooms. Running water, power and phones were also installed.

Moves and consolidation were not without their problems. Though they were put on cement foundations each one settled unequally. Leaks were common problems on the hallway sides where allowance had to be made for rain and snow to drain away. Balls found their way to get caught up there waiting for rescue by the caretaker.

The joined schools lasted 20 years and the service of single rooms prior to the move saved money too. Once the closure of the joined schools happened, single rooms reverted to loner status and were sold to local people to become other buildings used

in other ways.

Edson Trail School at DeBolt was an example of this kind of school. It was its own school, as was each classroom even as a six room school. A module was added to extend its use one more year. It closed in 1972.

What remains now is the gym, office area, and the well. It has power and a phone and a cement floor, having been used for trucking storage. It was offered for sale a few years ago for \$167,000 at a time when most small acreages (3-10 acres) of former school districts were returned to their original quarter section for \$1.00.



Valhalla School ca. 1950, with two "chicken coops" put together. In 1956 a new six-room school was built for the consolidated school in Valhalla. (SPRA 063.02.100.3)

Explore the History of DeBolt-Crooked Creek

By Fran Moore and Mary Nutting

The “Explore the History” section of our newsletter focuses on rural communities that were once more than what they are today. In this age of increasing urbanization and centralization, it is easy to forget that the history of the South Peace Region is found in these places. Settlers arriving throughout the first half of the last century settled largely in the countryside. They made their living from the soil and the other natural resources the region offered. Distance, time, and poor roads were often obstacles to travel, so once arrived; people tended to work and play locally. As transportation improved, services tended to centralize. The small communities began to fade, until they became distant, but perhaps fond, memories.

Today we will explore the history of the DeBolt-Ridgevalley area by following sections of the old roads in the area. It is difficult to determine exactly when each road was built, but the view on Google Earth shows some of these old roads, parts of which are now un-used, very clearly.

Heading east from the Goodwin Hay Camp and Darwin School, which were considered the west edge of the “DeBolt Territory,” turn north on Range Road 12, and then immediately east on the second access. This road was built in 1932 during the Great Depression, but, looking at the road plans, it could also be part of the 1911 Edson Trail, the first surveyed road in this area. Further improvements were made in 1944 and 1947 when all the material for the Alaska Highway was being hauled up from Edmonton and over the Smoky River Ferry. (Just imagine that.)

Crossing Rge Rd 11, you enter the Hamlet of DeBolt via Alberta Avenue. There is a lot of history in DeBolt, including two cairns, one for the Edson-Grande Prairie Trail, the other for veterans of World War II. Behind the cairns is the Legion Hall, but when this road was built in 1932, this was the site of Bickell’s Sawmill.

The sawmill was on the Edson Trail, as were the homes of the DeBolt brothers who arrived in 1919. Elbert & Laura had the DeBolt Post Office (where the firehall is today), and it was on their land that the Hamlet of DeBolt was established. Brother George’s quarter bordered the hamlet on the north, where George and Virginia opened a Stopping Place for travelers.

Across the road from the sawmill, the DeBolt Agricultural Society & Country Club built a Community Hall, and beside it was a store. After the townsite was laid out ca. 1945, other buildings necessary to a farming community were added. Next to the Legion Hall was the Curling Club (now replaced by a recreation Centre. East of Main Street, Ringle’s Garage stood across from the DeBolt Hotel, and east of the garage was Morrison’s Store. The DeBolt General Store still sits on that site, and beside it, the Blue Apple Café., about where the DeBolt Bus Depot probably was in 1945.

A drive around the streets of DeBolt will reveal several historic names and buildings: seniors’ residences named after Edna Stevenson (the District Nurse) and Laura DeBolt; Hubert Memorial Park where the DeBolt & District Pioneer Museum Society has preserved some of the historical buildings of the area, including the original United Church manse; and the 1949 United Church which is now the DeBolt Community Church.

Following Alberta Avenue over DeBolt Creek, you soon arrive back at Highway 43. You can continue on the old road and curve up on Rge Rd 10 to visit the DeBolt Cemetery, or turn south onto the Highway.

Heading east on Highway 43, to the south you will see the gym and classrooms which are all that remains of the DeBolt School. It was established half a mile north of the hamlet in 1921 and moved to this site in 1935,

Grande Prairie River Rats Association

with Dorman Ditch

The River Rat Jet Boat Races in June 2014 reminded me that we have a package of material on the Grande Prairie River Rats given to us by Dorman S. Ditch.

Dorman reminisces about his early river boating. *“By the mid-1960s, river boating had become a family weekend adventure. Jet drive propulsion systems with dependable automotive inboard engines were commonplace. River boat hulls had changes in configuration to accommodate some comforts as upholstered seating, safety glass windshields with wipers, convertible tops, heaters and defrost systems. With all the added comforts and reliability, it was now practical to include the whole family.”*

By that time, the River Rats was already an identifiable group. Dorman remembers, *“I do believe it was back in 1967 that a group of the River Rats traveled by the Fraser, Herrick and McGregor River Systems in BC to retrieve the remains of an old automobile had been left at a trapper’s cabin on the shore of the river back in 1939. The Stojan family had donated it as a pilot car for the proposed Monkman Pass Highway to the West Coast from the Peace River Country.”* The highway project was abandoned when World War II began, but *“twenty-eight years later, five River Boats owned by Bill Sargent, Bob Field, Dorman Ditch, Dr. Cecil Compton, and Mel Rodacker, adventured up the rivers to find it. The end result was the now refurbished car in the Grande Prairie Museum which tells the story of the Monkman Pass Highway for all to remember.”*

When the group began to talk about building a rendezvous up the Smoky River, they realized the need to organize, so in April 1970, the Grande Prairie River Rats Association was formed. They proposed to acquire a wilderness land lease on strategically located Wolf Island

on the Smoky River. *“The location was perfectly suited... in a place that offered good access by river boat or helicopter only, with the space for unrestricted growth over time. Preliminary discussions with the government had suggested a lease would not be available, but then Wally Everitt of Radio Station CFGP and Ray Smuland of Alberta Forestry, two recent River Rats in Grande Prairie, went to work. Just a short time later, I got a phone call that confirmed that the Government approvals were forthcoming.”*

Although it was a massive challenge, volunteer labour and donated materials allowed them to build the rendezvous for \$3000.

The River Rats have faced many more challenges in the past 45 years—including several World’s River Boat Races in the area. If you have any photographs or textual records related to the River Rats activities, why not archive them as a tribute to this interesting group?



River Rats Rendezvous on Wolf Island in the Smoky River, taken by Beth Sheehan in 1976. (SPRA 002.05.06.415)

World War I

William Noll Diary

Many of the young men who left this area for World War I never returned, and we seldom hear their stories. The donation of the William Noll Diary by Chris Kinderwater gives us one of those stories.

William John Noll was born January 15, 1895 in Parkdale, Minnesota, the son of Sebastian Noll and Anna Leibel. In the Spring of 1914, William left Almena, Wisconsin and travelled to the Grande Prairie area over the Edson Trail. He filed on a homestead (SW 21-74-8 W6th) on October 30, 1913, living with the Frank and W. J. Kinderwater families, who were also from Almena. The Kinderwaters' brother Joseph Charles Kindervater was married to Ida Noll, William's sister.

William was also a partner of H. C. Plum in the packing business and worked on Plum's Bar 33 cattle ranch on the Smoky River. William became a naturalized British subject in August 1917 and obtained the patent to his land in January 1918.

William enlisted in the Royal North West Mounted Police in Regina in 1918 and was assigned to the RNWMP Battalion of the Canadian Cavalry Regiment. He achieved the rank of Trooper and his Regimental Number was 2684235. William served in Great Britain and was finally discharged July 16, 1919. He did not return to his ranch.

William Noll had an exciting life after World War I. He worked as a telegrapher, then a cheesemaker, a streetcar conductor, and a lumberjack before he went into the airplane tourism business along Oregon's Pacific Coast. He later attempted to become a pilot in Mexico, where he was wrongfully arrested for auto theft. Returning to Portland, William resumed his flying career in that area.

To read the whole story, check out the William Noll Diary online: www.southpeacearchives.org/publications/photo-essays/



Photographs, from top to bottom: William Noll (left) with his partner H.C. Plum and three bear cubs on the Smoky River flats ca. 1915; Mrs. Plum with the bear cubs ca. 1915; 1917 passport photo for a trip back home, but never used because of the war; H.C. Plum on the banks of the Smoky; Noll leaving the Peace Country in 1918; and a 1918 Army portrait of William Noll in RNWMP uniform.

where it was renamed the Edson Trail School because of its location.

Pick up the "Old Highway" again by turning north after Highway 43 curves south, then east at the T intersection. To the north is Altenhof Lake, the best source for cutting winter ice to stock the summer ice houses. This road once angled south-east, but now leads straight south to Twp Road 720 which we will follow east to where Harper Creek School was located, on the north-east corner of the intersection with Rge Rd 262. Built for an influx of new settlers after World War II, Harper Creek School existed for only seven years, from 1950-1957, until the schools in the area were consolidated to Ridgevalley.

Taking Rge Rd 262 back to Highway 43, we turn east again, past the Crooked Creek General Store. This is still the post office for the Crooked Creek/Ridgevalley area, and has been here since 1956.

Continue on to Range Road 261, then turn south again, cross Township Road 714 and turn west on an unmarked road, another part of the old highway. After a wooded section, you will see the Holy Rosary Catholic Church and Cemetery, established in 1940 and still active.

It was near here that the first Crooked Creek post office and store were established in 1930, and beside it a Community Hall. This burned down and was later replaced with an arena in the hamlet of Ridegevalley by the Crooked Creek Recreation Club.

The road leads us back to TR 714. We could pick it up again on the other side of the field, but will take a detour south through the Hamlet of Ridgevalley.

The first public building in this mainly Mennonite community was the Ridge Valley School in 1931. In 1956 the schools in the area were centralized to Ridgevalley and a new K-12 school built in the hamlet. Other buildings include the arena, a Mennonite Brethren Church (now a house—see if you can pick it out), the Rosedale Church, and the Ridgevalley Seniors Home.

Across from the Gas Co-op is the first store of Ridgevalley that was moved into the area and was in

operation until 1971. Next to it is the house that was home to the telephone centre until the late 1960's.

South of the hamlet was the Ridgevalley Co-op Cheese Factory, about where the Rosedale Christian School is now. The cheese factory was built in the 1930s and operated well into the 1940's. Members of the Mennonite community were busy in many needed trades and businesses (for example, Froese's Store, a Blacksmith Shop and Sawmills) and still are today. There are many local businesses such as P&G Kitchens and Sunrise Memorials.

Exit the hamlet on Twp Rd 713 west, to Rosedale Cemetery.

A mile west of the cemetery, turn north on Range Road 264—Harper Creek Road. After 2.5 miles, the road winds down to cross Harper Creek. Only a culvert conducts the creek under the road now, but this was where the Edson Trail also crossed Harper Creek.

At the top of the hill was the Bill Sargent homestead, shown on pages 18-19 of this newsletter, but we will turn west on Township Rd 720 and then north on Range Road 11, past Moore's Seed Processing, the Forestry houses along the highway, and the Cranberry Lake Rodeo Grounds. This was originally the DeBolt Ag Society rodeo grounds in 1930.

Looking at the Hamlet of DeBolt across the highway, we see the Gospel Light Church, which had its roots in the small Mennonite Brethren Church in the Hamlet of Ridgevalley.

So, here we are, back at DeBolt. The tour was a bit long today, but I hope you enjoyed the trip into history.

Resources:

[Google Earth](#)

[Discover the Peace Country website](#)

[Across the Smoky](#)

[Alberta Lands Township Maps & Road Plans](#)

Explore the History of DeBolt-Ridgevalley

- Resources:
- Google Earth
 - Discover the Peace Country website
 - Across the Smoky
 - Alberta Lands Township Maps & Road Plans

