

TELLING OUR STORIES

Volume 4, Issue 1, December 1, 2012

Produced by

South Peace 
REGIONAL ARCHIVES



Above, Mary Jean and David Carlisle skating with Carolyn and Dick Harris on the Carlisle's backyard rink in 1941. SPRA 0399.05.05, Carlisle family fonds.

Merry Christmas
and
Best Wishes for 2013!



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TELLING OUR STORIES

PUBLISHED BY
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The purpose of the SPRA Society is to promote and encourage the appreciation and study of the history of the south Peace River Country by acquiring, preserving and making accessible to the public, records in any format which reflect the history of this area.

December 1, 2012

Dear Members & Supporters;

The stories in this issue of our newsletter reflect the theme of "The Creative Process," and were collected at our 2012 "Film & Story Tea" on October 14. Many thanks to each storyteller who participated. Ninety-nine people attended, looking at the displays of artistic work and over-sized photographs, and visiting with storytellers and old friends. It was a lovely afternoon of reminiscences.

Thank you also to Board Chair Irene Nicolson who opened the event and manned the lights, archives staff Karen Burgess and Leslie Pearson who pulled it altogether as the M.C. and film narrator respectively, board member Gord Mackey who doubled as the photographer, volunteers Betty Welter, Gail Prette and Kathryn Auger who prepared the refreshments and manned the information table.

The program began with a film clip of hoola-hoopers from the 1950s, showing their creative talents. We have organized this newsletter in the same order as the program, with film clips in between the stories, and illustrated by the display photographs. Each photograph is labeled with an introductory quote from one of Shakespeare's works. (How creative!)

We have had some good feedback from our last issue on the history of the Bear Creek Valley. We apologize that there was no room in this issue for those submissions, and will include them in a future newsletter.

Thanks again for supporting the South Peace Regional Archives Society. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Sincerely,
Mary Nutting, Archivist
South Peace Regional Archives



*This Issue of Telling Our Stories
is sponsored by*

Mr. Mathew Wozniak

Each quarter we print about 225 newsletters, only 100 of which are for members. The rest are used to promote the archives at events and presentations, and are mailed out to community libraries and museums in our area, as well as to our Municipal Councils (upon request), our MLAs and MP. Thank you, Mathew, for covering the cost of printing and mailing Volume 4, Issues 1-4 for use in the communities of the south Peace.

You may recognise Mathew's name from other issues of this newsletter. He was a storyteller at the 2011 Film & Story Tea. He is the author of "How Eaglesham Got Its Golf Course" in the December 2009 newsletter, "The History of Rahab-Codesa" in June 2010, and "The South Eaglesham Mutual Telephone Co." in December 2011. Mathew has also donated Wozniak family records to this archives and is now volunteering with our Thursday group. His area of expertise is the farming communities in Birch Hills County.

The Creative Spirit

by Gordon Mackey

Editor's Note: The evening started with an amusing lecture from retired teacher Gordon Mackey on the need to be creative!

The creative process starts with IMAGINATION, something we all have, but perhaps in varying amounts. Please use your imagination as I talk.

The only book I've ever written is about creativity. It is a large book, but please imagine that it is somehow tucked into my hip pocket. Here, I'll get it out and show you.

Here's my book and in bold black lettering on the cover is the word "CREATIVITY", and below and in smaller black type are the words "by Gordon Mackey". In the corner is an imaginary creature.

What color is the cover of my book? And what is the imaginary creature in the corner of my book cover? What color is it?

Now I'm opening my book on creativity to Chapter One, whose title is "IMAGINATION". We've touched on that, so let's go to Chapter Two, whose title is "CHILDHOOD". It is easier for a child to express themselves with drawing, than using complex word skills, so a child may draw a circle with 3 dots in it, and to that child, it is "Mom". Below Mom, is another circle, and to that child, that circle is "the sun". It doesn't matter to a child that logically, the sun should be above the mother ... UNLESS AN OLDER PERSON TELLS THE KID THAT HE OR SHE IS WRONG! And THAT is wrong. Comments like that stifle creativity in kids ... OFTEN FOR THEIR ENTIRE LIFE !

Chapter Three. "PUBERTY". Yes, puberty. At about that age, a person becomes very conscious of what other people think of them. All creative juices dry up. When they try to express themselves, they say and do only what their peers are already saying and doing.



A lovely snowman, sculpture at its finest, captured on the Wood Family film. The film's a bit of a tragedy, however, since the snowman does not survive. This snapshot and the others on succeeding pages are actually still images taken from the film and video footage shown at the Film and Story Tea.

Chapter Four. "PRACTICE". After puberty, we are still shy, but we recognize our own desire to be creative, so we practice. We may write poems, songs or stories. We may doodle designs, draw cars, paint or carve. Whatever we do, we seldom let other people know about it, but we practice it and gradually develop some skill and a bit of confidence.

Chapter Five. "LESSONS". Some people gain confidence in their personal skills by taking lessons. This tells the world that the person is interested in that topic, and the person often finds others with similar interests. The person also learns new techniques. Some people never take formal lessons, but choose to study on their own by watching DVDs, reading books or magazines dealing with their chosen field. They are still taking lessons, but not directly from a teacher.

Chapter Six. "ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER". An alternate title for this chapter is "ALWAYS THINKING". In my personal opinion, and remember this is MY book so I can say whatever I want, I think that most creative people, including myself, have some

degree of what is sometimes called attention deficit disorder. My mind wanders. I daydream. I start one thing, then go to another, then another, then back to the first, and so on. I am always thinking. I eventually finish most things, but not in the logical order a math teacher might expect of me. This is OK, in fact it is GOOD in at least two ways: (one) I seem to have many more ideas than other people do ... or at least what other people will admit to, and (two) I am never bored with my own company.

Chapter Seven. "BRAVE BRAIN". This is the last and most difficult chapter in my book. I truly think we are all much more creative than we admit. Some of us may have had our creativity suppressed when we were young, usually by other people making fun of us or by downright cruel words and actions. I'm sorry if this happened to you, because it shouldn't have been done to you. However, adults can make choices for themselves, and I have found the hardest choice I EVER made IN MY ENTIRE LIFE was to tell other people that I am an artist. Much harder than telling my dad "Yes, Dad, it was me that drank your bottle of whiskey". When somebody tells me they are not creative, or that they can't draw a stick man, I think they are lying to themselves as well as to me. The hardest thing about creativity is letting other people know! Seriously, when a person lets his or her brain be brave enough to tell the world they are creative, and they are prepared to be criticized by people who always put other people down ... when your brain is brave enough to put your head on that line or in other words "stick your neck out", THAT is the moment your creative juices are released ...

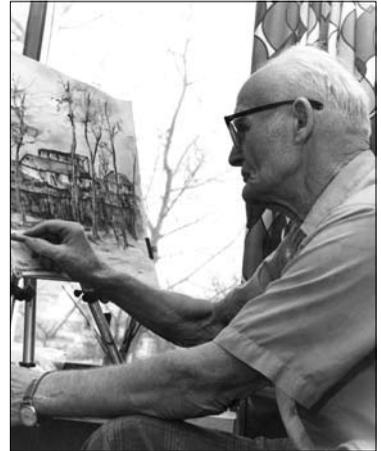
you finally allow your imagination take over, you start doing creative things regardless of who knows it, and damn it, YOU FEEL GOOD.

Would you please do me a favor? Take this book, read it yourself, then give it to somebody else who may like to read it.

May the rest of this day be a very creative one for you. Thank you.

"Give me some music..."

Valhalla Band members at the Skunk Lake Sawmill with their instruments, 1926. The leader of the Valhalla Band was Harry Horte who is standing at the rear of the drums. SPRA 2009.082.32, Rorem family fonds.



Since there is no photo of Gord telling his story (he was the photographer), we include this one of another artist, Otto Kuhn, of Grande Prairie, in 1977. SPRA 0192.05.03.11a, Frank Kozar fonds.



Bea Collins, A Creative Life

by Angie (Collins) Patterson

When mum loaded up the family and headed to Canada, arriving in Grande Prairie on April 19, 1966, I'm not sure any of us suspected what was going to happen!

In her mid-fifties she set about expanding her already creative life in this new and wonderful place and then living it full tilt. Any idea that seemed a good one she ran with, her convictions and passion paving the way for numerous adventures. Her creative life is about not only what she did but insight to how she viewed life in general, creatively.

How the family arrived in Grande Prairie: After setting sail from Liverpool and crossing the Atlantic in exciting stormy weather Peter, John and two family friends drove the Land Rover (which made the crossing) across Canada. The rest of the family set out by train for Edmonton with a quick stay at the Macdonald Hotel. Dad left first as he headed for Grande Prairie to take over a medical practice. Mum's parting words, a day later, with the Macdonald Hotel was about their light fixtures having electrical problems, only to discover it was actually static electricity due to the Canadian dry air.

As the last of us made the final leg of the journey mum hailed a taxi, yes a taxi, and said she would like to go to Grande Prairie. Confusion reigned even further when she asked the female driver to please put the trunk in the boot. We really did have a trunk (7 in total), not a suitcase, and finally the driver realized the trunk was to go in the trunk. Following this we had to go to the taxi depot as female drivers were not allowed to travel out of the city. While mum thought this a bit strange we did change drivers and set off. Why a taxi? Mum was told Grande Prairie was the next city and in

England the next community could be only a few miles apart; so this is what she expected. So, yes, mum and part of the family really did arrive in Grande Prairie delivered by taxi to the Swan Motel for approximately \$100.00.

Once a house was secured one of mum's first projects was the opening of a small art store in partnership with my older sister, Caroline. Caroline moved to Hawaii shortly afterwards and rather than abandon the project mum continued for what turned out to be a number of years. She operated with simply a telephone, order catalogues and a cash register. She taught numerous craft classes, moved several times, changed the store name, expanded her own talents and had Vicki Hotte and Jim Geary guessing as to what might come next as they so lovingly helped her. There was never a dull moment as she kept Jim on his toes as to where he might find something a customer was looking for, often defying his logic but not hers.

It didn't take long for her to branch out into the community and begin thinking of the British tradition of the pantomime so she wrote out a script from Dick Whittington and his Cat. From the first Christmas pantomime, where she was sewing the tails on the mice as they waited to go on stage, to the final years in the Douglas J. Cardinal Performing Arts Centre she believed in contributing to the community and this was another labour of love she simply went ahead with.

In the years of the Balloon Championships she decided it would be a good idea to host a "tea" for the pilots to relax and mingle. Tea grew into the idea of lunch hosted at our house on the acreage and turned into a wonderful collection of making new friends amidst an array of food continually



over-flowing from a kitchen barely big enough for two people. Hardly able to contain her excitement the day she was offered a balloon ride as she lifted off my dad called, “you can’t go up there!” to which she replied, “it’s too late, I’m gone!”

In amongst her many activities, mum decided to take up painting and drawing, forging ahead with an almost reckless abandonment with the fun of it all. It wasn’t long before these forays lead her to the homestead of Euphemia McNaught for painting classes and a bit of Irish coffee. My dad was never sure if this was a good idea, thinking it was more about the Irish coffee than the painting. This was evident the night mum came home to report that upon coming in the front door the first thing she saw was a squirrel perched on top of a curtain rail. Dad was convinced she’d enjoyed too much coffee and put his foot down about her continuing the classes. Mum eventually got the squirrel out of the house and was back painting and sipping Irish coffee the following week.

Mum loved to drive the Buick convertible and did everything from run out of gas, relatively frequently, race the occasional hot shot as the traffic light changed to green, and get caught in the rain one day. Undeterred she simply opened up her umbrella at any red light she had to stop for. She often drove long into the fall with the roof down, necessitating the heater going full blast and sometimes dodging snowflakes. One day, when driving home a little too ambitiously she was stopped by the RCMP and asked to present her “pink ticket”. Thinking creatively, it wasn’t long before she innocently asked, “Can you please tell me what it looks like?” and shortly after that, “Can you please tell me where I might find it?” whereupon she turned her handbag upside down on the seat and emptied out the contents. At this point the RCMP just gave her a

look and said, “Lady, just slow down and go home”. At that point she was quite possibly thinking, “Why slow down?” and “It’s too late, I’m gone”. It was clearly another adventure in the creative life of Bea Collins.



“The quality of mercy is not strained...”

Torun School Junior Red Cross, girls from Peggy Mair’s class, create a quilt to raffle for the war effort, 1943. SPRA 0168.01.02, Peggy Mair fonds.



Euphemia “Betty” McNaught teaching a beginners’ art class at the Beaverlodge Cultural Centre in 1992. In this film clip, Betty is commenting on the quality of line when sketching.

Bedpan Alley to Art Gallery

by Doris McFarlane

In late 1989, a group of determined citizens of Beaverlodge were bold enough to hold a public information meeting. Our proposal: to form a cultural society, then acquire, relocate and refurbish the old Beaverlodge Hospital (built 1937 and to be demolished) for a Cultural Centre. Luckily for this committee, we had living on the McNaught Homestead, Euphemia McNaught, well known artist and a diligent promoter of the arts since the 1930s. It had been her dream to have a special place where art could be taught, displayed and promoted, a constant source of help and encouragement.

So we dared to dream.

First we had to buy the building, find an appropriate location, have an assessment of the building by both structural and electrical engineers, build

a new basement and find movers, etc. There of course was ONE huge problem--we had "NO" money. The Enterprise Centre, in Beaverlodge were professionals in unheard of and unusual situations.

One concern of our committee, would art sell in such a small town? The Centre provided space for 6 months trial--at the Enterprise Centre--one large room at our disposal--where we displayed local art. It was a huge success--we were on our way!

The Enterprise Centre directed us through all the initial political protocol: how to work for Historic Resource status, how to source funding, etc. Actually I got so efficient in the funding area that I acquired the name Freddy the Freeloader. (After 20 years the title still applies. Last year a gentleman came to the Cultural Center office inquiring about Freddy.)

We moved quickly. The Hospital Board gave us the building for \$1.00. The Town of Beaverlodge donated the land on 5th Avenue near Highway 43. The engineers donated time. The basement was dug for \$40,000. The superb movers, the McConnells, from Millet, Alberta--\$40,000. We received some generous personal donations. Grants received--CFEP (Government of Alberta), CTAP (County of Grande Prairie), Beaverlodge Historical Society (\$10,000) and Beaverlodge Lions Club. Then the untold hours of volunteer labour to make the structure habitable.

With volunteers in mind, they cannot be properly thanked. The days started early in



Another snapshot from the Betty McNaught art class film as she demonstrates technique and shading when drawing with charcoal.

the morning with carpenters, drywallers, electricians--most of us worked until 8:00 p.m., then home. Have to mention our drywaller/plasterer--he would work unusual hours. We often came in early in the morning to find him horizontal in a bath tub (dry). Had a taste for the classical, brought a radio/tape player--inspirational music to keep us alert.

Another special man who came to Beaverlodge from the North to retire had been a contractor. He was priceless, but after some months of "yours truly" he decided he'd not take orders from a woman any longer. His wife phoned me the bad news. I had to keep him working on the project so set up

a system where I told his co-worker what I wanted done--he relayed. After 24 hours of that, it was so ridiculously funny, he got back on track. But I picked up another flattering name--the Sergeant Major!

I could go on with many stories (another day). Anyway, we moved on December 15, 1991, early in the morning. That was a feat in itself.

Today, 20 years on, we have acquired recognition for efficiency and dependability. We serve the children of the area with art classes. Pottery and weaving classes can be had when there is a demand for them. Art classes are held regularly in the upstairs Art Room for both children and adults; classes that are often tailored to the capabilities and experience of the artists.

Our gallery is available to all artists. Wood carvers, weavers, potters, quilters, etc. all find a place to display and sell their work. Twelve shows per year.

Euphemia McNaught can be proud that she has inspired so many to do so much. Her work has been an everlasting inspiration to us all. We trust this Cultural Centre will continue to grow and be a living memorial to her and all of those who envisioned turning an old hospital into a vibrant, useful, and attractive addition to this area.

All I can say is "Anything can happen, but we have to work at it!"



"How poor are they that have not patience!"

Grande Prairie Women's Institute quilters at work, 1965. SPRA 0371.05.03.38, Grande Prairie Women's Institute fonds.

The Sands of Time

by Marion Hill

My craft is called “The Sands of Time”. I am Marion Hill from Beaverlodge.

I never thought that a farmer’s daughter, and then, a farm wife, would ever collect sand. And I never did, until I learned this craft the first winter, 1982, we retired to Arizona.

Some of you may have driven through the Oak Creek Canyon, or in the area of Lake Mead, or through the Valley of Fire, or other colourful areas.

The American Indians of the south-west desert used coloured sand to draw religious pictures on the desert floor, and scratch them out at sundown. A method was devised that made the pictures permanent.

I am not an artist. I don’t draw my own pictures. I am like a cook who needs a recipe, or a seamstress who needs a pattern. I use ideas from calendars, newspaper ads, post cards, etc. And I have worked out my own method of making pictures from coloured sand. I mostly use art boards, glass, masonite, anything non-porous.

It looks complicated, but if you can hold a pencil, you can hold a paint brush. Children’s while glue is thinned with a little water [for the adhesive].

I teach children after they have been in school for a year, and anyone else. At the moment, there are four seniors in Amisk Court who are working on pictures. I use carbon paper. One lady brought a picture of her farm house, and made a really nice sand picture. Her picture of a horse pulling a sleigh full of people turned out very well. Another lady did a picture on glass of her son’s cabin.

My topics are varied from chick-a-dees, Canada geese and deer, to log schools and

stained glass pictures. But if I use the same picture, often quite a few times, I change the shape of the branches, or use a different colour of brown, or yellow, or white sand. Some of my pictures are similar, but no two are the same.

I sieve, wash and dry my sand, and label where it came from. I have collected maybe one quarter of my collection of over 500 medicine bottles. I am grateful to the many people who took the trouble to bring me sand from their travels.

The Cultural Centre in Beaverlodge is a great place where artists and craft people can display their work.



We might be stretching it, but we’ve chosen to classify hula-hooping as a “performing art”. If you were at the Film and Story Tea, you’ll know these girls had talent. And energy! The film was taken by the Eaglesham Board of Trade to document life in the Eaglesham area and features many different family and community activities and events.



Some snapshots of the Film & Story Tea taken by Gord Mackey, from top left clockwise: Dr. Irene Nicolson, SPRA Board Chair, welcoming all; Mistress of Ceremonies, Karen Burgess; Film Narrator and general assistant, Leslie Pearson, and some of the crowd at Film & Story Tea. In the background are the enlarged photographs created for the event and featured in this newsletter with their Shakespearean captions. They are now on display in the Grande Prairie Museum Community Room.



For the Love of Music

by Pat Larter

In order to understand the message I want to relay to you, I think you should know a little about my background. The Larter family came to Grande Prairie in the summer of 1969, having sailed from Liverpool to Montreal on the Canadian Pacific ship *Empress of Canada*. We bought a second hand car and camped our way across Canada to Grande Prairie. Having reached Four Mile Corner, I was dismayed at not being able to see Grande Prairie, which, according to my map, should be at the intersection!!

However, we soon found that this community of 10,000 people was a hive of creative talent, which suited us as my husband, Syd and myself were musicians and to a lesser degree, thespians.

It is important to know that I had been brought up in a suburb of a large city, Leeds, of half a million people, and had been used to going to weekly concerts of the Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra, for sixpence (approximately a dime), at Leeds Town Hall. This was an imposing building, with a domed roof, so many stairs to the entrance, that you had done your day's workout when you got inside and two fierce stone lions glaring at whoever entered. Once inside, you had a wonderful concert hall with a big pipe organ, and wonderful acoustics.

You can imagine our delight, when we saw an advertisement in the Daily Herald Tribune for a piano Recital organised by the Alaska Music Trails. We dressed in our Best clothes and off we went to the Montrose gym!! The pianist seated himself and played beautifully. I looked and there hung the basketball net – like a halo -- above him. I had to close my eyes and let the sound wash over me and inspire me without any visual image. That turned

out to be the last concert of that Association.

Shortly after, my husband and a small group of music lovers got together and formed the Peace Country Overture Concerts Association, whose mission was to provide a broad spectrum of professional artists to the Peace Country in a series of concerts each year and at as reasonable a price as possible. This way, local aspiring musicians and dancers, would have a wider experience of the performing arts. Once the Douglas Cardinal Theatre was finished, we had a facility that the performers themselves were thrilled to use. We never had any difficulty in selling almost all the seats on a seasonal basis.

We also welcomed the artist into our homes after the performances. The one time I was hosting the Moscow Woodwind Quintet and I was apprehensive about what to serve. However, I had decided to make a LARGE punch bowl, laced with vodka, to make them feel at home. I soon realised that the punch, which was quickly consumed, was just the prelude to the real serious drinking, and one of the committee members made a couple of trips to the liquor store for the real, undiluted stuff. One of the performers had an abscessed tooth and found the vodka to be better than a visit to the dentist, though I think he did go later.

The evening became very relaxed and our eldest son, who was a budding clarinetist, got a free lesson from a real professional!!

There is a lesson that I hope you might have gathered from my talk. If not, I'll share it with you. What I learned from my first concert here, which was



such a different experience from my norm, was that no matter where you are, whatever your surroundings, or your dress, the beauty of music or dance will come through and revive your spirit.

On the right are two frames from film clips of typical Peace Country Concerts: top, a scene from the 1992 Fiddlers' Jamborees hosted by the Grande Prairie Museum at the Golden Age Centre; and bottom, another film clip from Eaglesham--a posed brass band. Not terribly interesting for the watchers of the film or for the boys in the band. It's not apparent in this snapshot, but the boy in the middle of the front row soon livens things up by throwing dirt and rocks!



"In sweet music is such art..."

Clairmont United Church choir gathered in 1936 or 1937 around an organ, trophy and plaque won in a competition, perhaps the music festival. Back

row L-R: Walter Callister, Gwen Hunt, Harold Hunt, Mrs. Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Mrs. McDonald, Leslie Miles, and Gordon Forbes. Middle row: Mrs. Alvin Delaney, Mrs. Dixon, Mrs. Walter Callister, Evangeline Cavett, Mrs. Miles, and Mrs. Hedley Johnson. Front: Mrs. Margaret (Moore) Walker and Mrs. Jack Callister. SPRA 1969.10.14, Pioneer Museum Society of Grande Prairie & District fonds.



Peace Country Square Dancing

by Wilma Friesen

My husband and I were fortunate to be in Penticton one summer when their annual square dance jamboree was being held.

Sheets of plywood were somehow joined together for the dancers to dance upon. This was held at a huge baseball park with many bleachers for seating of spectators.

When the callers started calling a square dance the whole mass of people dancing would move simultaneously. Terrific to watch with all their colorful outfits. We were hooked and soon began taking lessons the next fall.

When I think about the years we square danced, I appreciate all the benefits we received when taking part. First and foremost I think of all the wonderful, friendly people we met from all over the Peace Country and beyond. We made many life-time friends. Next would be the fun--we had the odd grouchy person dancing, but most were fun-loving people.

Most square dancing is at a fast pace, so exercise we got. Someone said in an evening of square dancing we would travel about five miles. This was also good for the mind as we had to listen to the caller and hopefully do as he or she suggested.

Community halls, school gyms and auditoriums were the structures we usually danced in. A fun-loving man or woman caller contributed much to our learning and fun. We were called squares--a square consisted of four couples--usually a man and a woman together unless we were short a person. A broom or a mop would be borrowed from the janitor's closet to make up the missing person. Not only did some dancers have a hard

time knowing their right and left hands for many of the movements, but the broom sure helped to break down many a square.

Lessons are essential for square dancing. Beginners quite often find the movements to be a hard learning curve. The caller would teach us new moves and then call a square to use these new moves--learn we did.

Special square dance clothes were expected to be worn when taking part. The ladies, many of whom were very talented seamstresses, sewed many of their outfits. If they danced as a couple, the dress or blouse and skirt would be made of the same material as the man's shirt. Some men would wear a neckerchief to match their partner's outfit. Crinolines, that were extremely full, would be worn under the dresses or skirts. As some men really enjoyed swinging the women, specially made bloomers which matched their outfit or crinoline were usually worn. Laughter always erupted if the elastic broke on the crinoline or bloomers.

Many dancers loved to collect square dance badges. If four men in a square were bald-headed, the people in that square could purchase a bald-headed badge. Many dancers had quite a collection so wore one at appropriate times. I found some of our badges--a donkey badge--I don't remember how we obtained that one. Sweetheart Valentine Dancer badge, Sadie Hawkins, Leap Year and Crimson Heart. The Crimson Heart was obtained when an "owie" was obtained from a fingernail or pin.

I lived with Shirley Sherk at University and our first year of teaching in Grande Prairie. She had on a Shirley Temple badge so I asked her how she





Majorettes performing at a large Elks/Royal Purple Convention. Majorettes in purple and white definitely add some zest to the proceedings! The film was donated by the Marcy family.

obtained that badge. Shirley looked at me and said, "Wilma, that's my name!" I was thinking of the child actress--Temple was her married name!

Jamborees were held in the spring or summer--usually on a Saturday afternoon and evening. Usually a guest caller would come to call. As all callers speak English, we had ones from Japan, Germany and Holland. Dancers really had to listen to the calls as every caller had their own way of calling. Dancers would come together from all over the Peace Country and beyond. Up to 30 squares could fit into most gyms or halls.

In the afternoon a workshop would be held to teach new moves. The host club would prepare a dinner (supper time). I don't remember any hosting club running out of food. The evening would have square dancing, usually using the new moves learned in the afternoon. Exercise, fun and friend-

ships, and learning came out of these Jamborees.

Round dancing goes right along with square dancing. There is a caller who calls the movements. Everyone in the world does the same steps to the same song. Usually round dancing is done with a long-time partner. Lessons may be taught on a different time of the week or the dances can be taught along with square dancing. At a jamboree a couple of square dances (called 'tips') will be called and then a round dance will be called. Contra dancing is where everyone can get up and dance as the caller will call a lively, easy pattern of steps which repeat and repeat.

There are not many clubs still operating in the Peace Country. A friend (lady) and I went up to Dawson Creek this spring to attend the 50th Anniversary of the Dawson Creek Club. I was pleasantly surprised to be able to take part in squares and not break them down. Hopefully, square dancing will make a comeback in the future.



"Music oft hath such a charm..."

Grande Prairie Brass Band around 1921: George Duncan, Harry Watcher, Ernie Kirstein, Gus Kirstein, Ralph Johnston, N. D. McFarlane, Charles Stredulinsky, George Tate, Harold Melsness, A. B. Hedman, Frank Johnston, Tom Waterman, and Gus Gerd. SPRA 2001.01.062, Pioneer Museum Society of Grande Prairie & District fonds.

Dance Revues at the Old Capitol Theatre

by Margaret Bowes

You might be surprised to learn that the old McQueen Presbyterian Church was used for several different activities after it was replaced by the new white wooden St. Paul's United Church in 1926.

McQueen Presbyterian Church remained next to St. Paul's Church for many years until it was moved to the Heritage Village at the Grande Prairie Museum. For several years there was an attachment to the back of the church where Mr. & Mrs. Broughten lived. They were caretakers for St. Paul's.

In the latter 1930s, Miss Valerie Ellwood came to Grande Prairie and began teaching dancing lessons - Ballet, Softshoe, and Tap. McQueen Church was empty and Miss Ellwood was able to have classes there. For a period of time she took the passenger train to Beaverlodge and taught dancing there, and stayed overnight with Mr. & Mrs. Ed Heller and then returned to Grande Prairie the next day on the freight train.

My mother used to play for all the various dance performances as well as make all our costumes. All the mothers made the girls' costumes. In most cases, the outfits could be adapted to wear later for special occasions or for school.

My sister Erin and cousin Margot were about seven years old and did a "John Bull and Uncle Sam" tap dance and had very good costumes. Someone from the Chamber of Commerce

Another snapshot from the Eaglesham Board of Trade film. Dances could be very informal, like this one, which takes place in a home. A little crowded, perhaps, and short a few men, but still fun!

asked them to perform when the first troop train with American soldiers stopped in Grande Prairie on the way to Dawson Creek to begin construction of the Alaska Highway. I believe there is a picture in archives of the two girls dancing in the back of a pickup truck at the station while volunteers were serving coffee and doughnuts to the troops.



My sister Alice and I performed the "Scarf Dance". We had pretty pastel shades of chiffon dresses that were below the knee and had matching scarves. Of course in those days all our costumes were very modest and we had matching bloomers (nothing scanty!). We didn't have a large space for all the girls to change and we often had to make quick changes from one outfit to another as we all danced several dances.

Our dance included a glide, a turn and a graceful hand movement with the scarf. Unfortunately for me, I could feel that somehow or other one



leg of my matching bloomers was showing beneath the hem of my dress, so I spent the whole dance taking a step, then trying to pull up the bloomers and still doing my best to make the graceful movement with the scarf. The dance lost some of the grace that was intended, but the crowd had quite a laugh at my predicament! I discovered when we got home that in my haste to change I had pulled one of the legs up around my waist which left the larger waist part to droop!

Miss Ellwood married George Patterson who was Mr. D.W. Patterson's nephew, and they moved from Grande Prairie about 1943. So that was the end of the spring dance revues in the old Capitol Theatre.



"The play's the thing..."

The cast of The Improper Henry Proper, performed around 1945 at the Grande Prairie High School. Standing L-R: Norine Sheehan, Mava Crerar, Lawrence Moon, Arlie Nokes, Ray Nokes, Elsie Mills, and Max Swanston. Sitting: Dorothy Patterson, Jim Carlisle, Lorne Anderson, and Jean Bellamy. SPRA 0399.11.09, Carlisle Family fonds.



"When you do dance, I wish you a wave o' th' sea ..."

Greenway School Ukrainian Dance Group at the Spirit River School Festival. The group includes Jean Mechanuk, Mary Sandul, Cecile Connolly, Rose Rosko, Pauline Sandul and Dorothy Connolly. SPRA 2004.37.02, South Peace Regional Archives Photograph collection.

Let the Houselights Dim

by Janet Ophus

A while back Margaret Bowes requested that I write a story for the Film & Story Tea telling about a play we were in entitled "Look Out Lizzie". I remember but, Good Grief Margaret, that was 60+ years ago! She agreed, but it made no difference. Oprah's monthly magazine ends with "What I Know For Sure". So, here I am to tell you, what I know for sure, and some of what I don't know for sure.

Storytelling Granny, on the Golden Girls sitcom, would wave her arm in the air and say, "picture this!" So let's begin THE CREATIVE PROCESS with a trip down my memory lane.

Imagine a scene between my sister Jean and me. "Are you ready to leave for rehearsal?, she yelled across the space between her house and mine at the service station on the Four-Mile corner. "Let's get going."

'Getting going' involved Jean taking the wheel of Buster's and my old chevy. It took our collective courage. The car barely had brakes. Remember the shoemaker who had no shoes? Well, with two mechanics on duty you would think.....well!!!

Off we go onto the highway. Thankfully, back in the early 50s there was little traffic. We needed a license plate that

Right, the cast from "Look Out Lizzie" performed by St. Paul's United Church Youth Group in 1952. SPRA 174.03.21.

said "Sit down, hold on, don't talk!".

Every trip was an adventure, but we were determined to get rehearsal in the United Church on time. With angle parking we usually ended up on the sidewalk in front of the Coca-Cola plant, very glad we arrived without mishap as we pushed the car back onto the street.



Inside the church we joined a group of young adults who put on plays to raise money to build an addition to the church building. It contained several rooms and staircases to accommodate the growing needs of the congregation and staff.

In the picture of "Look Out Lizzie" [used on the program], the actors are Bob Littleton, Janet (Bellamy) Ophus, Margaret (O'Brien) Bowes, Jean (Bellamy/Mueller) Parsons, Jim Henning, George



Simpson, Albert Given, and Georgina (Given) Collins, friends who had a great time producing this play and who can be credited with some of the groundwork for the Little Theatres we enjoy in our city today. We didn't have a producer or stage manager, but we did have Georgie Collins as director.

The venue for staging in Grande Prairie was the very old Capitol Theatre where the Park Hotel still sits. The theater later housed Taylor and Pearson Auto Parts, a jitney dance hall, and the performing arts venue for the music festival.

We were out to raise money so took the play out of town. Margaret talked about going to Teepee Creek and DeBolt. Brave souls in 1952. In DeBolt, to change position on the stage, we had to run out the side door on one side, around the building, and in the other door. Picture that! A good reason to do these things while young.

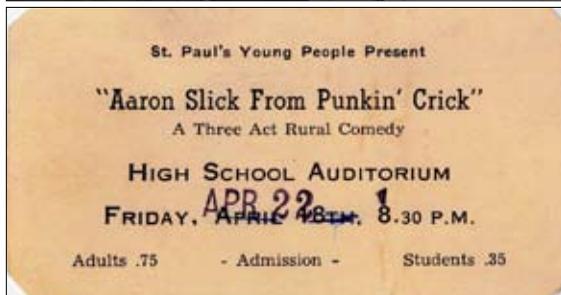
"Aaron Slick from Punkin' Crik" was a comedy most of us were also involved with. Memory is short for this one, however. Such an interesting title, with information on the internet. I remember being in a very funny comedy with Bill Blais, who was a Jerry Lewis wannabe. It went over well at home, but the audience at Beaverlodge did not find it amusing. That's hard. In the second act, Bill decided to ad lib, throwing the rest of the cast off cue, and the crowd into hysterics. Go figure.

My daughters have been involved in the Little Theatres in Grande Prairie: acting, stage managers, ushering and sundry duties assigned. If I am missing a tea set, a picture off the wall, a rug, whatever, one or the other will turn up on stage. My daughter in Australia has directed and acted in several productions as well, such as "The Sound of Music", "When the Rain Stops Falling", "Annie", and others. So it is a family affair.



Did Jean and I make it home alright? We sailed through the south driveway waving to our husbands who stood with arms folded, shaking their heads in disbelief, finally getting the brakes to work just short of entering the highway on the north side. A few nights later we did it over again. All this I know for sure.

Everything has to start somewhere, so we can thank Lizzie, Aaron Slick and the actors of all early productions for opening the curtains and dimming the houselights for stage play acting in Grande Prairie. It was a grand time in our lives.



Left, the cast for "Aaron Slick from Punkin' Crik": George Simpson, Jean Bellamy, Albert Given, Bob Littleton, Janet Ophus, Margaret O'Brien, Jim Henning and Georgina Given, SPRA 2012.48, and a door ticket shared by Mrs. Ophus.

Mrs. Vivian Smythe-Kirsey's Vase!

by Gerard Dufour

Let me first put the characters in place so you can perhaps have an idea of the mystery play, "*Here Comes Charlie!*"

Mrs. Vivian Smythe-Kirsey--an eccentric social climber, having in her possession Aunt Fanny's antique vase--sitting prominently on a pedestal.

Then there is the Butler--a crude man from the Ozarks--who always brags, "I ain't never buttled afore."

How could such characters make for a mystery? Well, let me tell you how we in the Spirit River Drama club made out at the first dress rehearsal performed for an elementary school class.

As the play progressed and action on stage grew, someone would move or brush near the pedestal; Vivian Smythe-Kirsey would grow pale--as she would intone--"Careful of my Antique Vase!"

So by the 3rd act, the great mystery starts to unravel. The pearls are stolen and it sure seems that the Butler is the culprit. Like he says, "I ain't never buttled afore".

Now my role was the beau, and at this stage, I was becoming frustrated with Vivian Smythe-Kirsey and her "Vase". After the usual admonition, "Careful my Vase", I went into a rage, grabbed the vase in one hand, throwing it violently to the floor where it smashed into a thousand pieces. Ahh--exposing the missing pearls!

Now just think of our poor drama club, hang in the plans the enactment of this scene over and over again for numerous performances. So, in rehearsal, we always used "make believe" vases, keeping the real thing for the actual smashing at



the stage performance. Since our plans were for 6 performances, this would require 6 vases to be destroyed! From the cast we gathered 4 donated vases -- and for the dress rehearsal, we used the one donated by Ruby McDonald. It had a large hole in the side, so we made sure this part did not face the audience.

So now, I have to take you back to the climax scene at dress rehearsal. I lose my cool throwing the vase to the floor, saying "Damn your antique Vase...!" The Butler--Hugh McKenna, reaches down to lift up the "missing pearls". As he does this, there is a rhythmic sound of the pearls falling on the floor and rolling down into the audience. The children are laughing their heads off--the Butler stands there holding a bare string!! This was supposed to be the serious part! We consoled ourselves by saying the children had not paid to come see the performance anyway.

This now required deep strategy planning! How to prevent the vase from cutting the string of pearls with the smashing impact of the vase on stage. It was decided that one of the cast in the scene would discreetly drop a good necklace among the debris of the vase, in other words, not leaving the fate of the string of pearls to chance again.

That same evening we put on the performance for the public, then confident that this kind of disaster would not occur again. Our strategy was well planned. The butler was the one to discreetly drop the string of pearls among the debris. Mrs.

Vivian Smythe-Kirsey would melodiously say the lines, "Look! Look, everyone, my precious pearls!" as she would bend down to pick them up. Ah, but once again disaster struck! Beryl Weberg, who was playing the role of Mrs. Smythe-Kirsey, happened to wear very heavy eye glasses. Her role required her to use stage lorgnettes as a sign of her class superiority. Then Beryl was frantically groping through the debris to say her lines, but the hesitation seemed endless as she could not see to find the damn pearls! The Butler finally kicked them toward her hand, and Beryl's face lit up as she melodically said, "Look everyone, my pearls." (We had never thought to have Beryl remove her own glasses at rehearsals.)

Then came the day of reckoning. We had smashed all four of our donated vases, and we had to put on one more performance. Ruby Scott had to buy a new vase, so naturally she bought a vase (it even looked ugly), but we didn't have the heart to smash a beautiful and valuable vase. To describe this newly acquired vase, well, it was made of very thick pottery and a little bizarre looking.

By then our performances were put on with much dramatic gusto, and even confidence. After all, the audiences were laughing in all the right places. But alas, the new vase proved to be a challenge. Once again the great scene arrived. I went to the pedestal, grabbed the famous vase, and threw it to the floor with all the force I could muster! The vase went boom, boom, boom, bouncing to the very edge of the stage, leaving the entire cast speechless. (How could the pearls be discovered?) Quickly, this require ad libbing, I continued to shout

agry words at Aunt Fanny's vase, while jumping on it with both feet, until it finally broke, thus exposing the mystery pearls!



A snapshot of the opening scene of a 1991 Eaglesham Drama Club production of "I'll Meet You in the Far Pasture". The play was written by local playwright Stephen Cregg and tells the story of the Lassiter Project, a homesteading initiative of the 1950s, north of Eaglesham. Needless to say, the surroundings and (lack of) amenities are not quite what this young wife was expecting!



"All the world's a stage..."

The cast of Lighthouse Nan, performed in 1921 at the Dramatic Hall in Spirit River. SPRA 0394.10, James Lillico family fonds.

Programme of 2nd Concert by the Grande Prairie Concert Orchestra

The following is the excellent programme that has been arranged for the concert to be given by the Grande Prairie Concert Orchestra, at the Grand Theatre on the evening of Wednesday, March 14th. This concert, as was announced in these columns last week, is being given to raise funds to help finance our two delegates, who

are in Ottawa fighting our railway battles, and which is indeed a very worthy effort on the part of Mr. Wm. Jones and Mr. J. E. Thompson, who have left their businesses here to go to Ottawa to work on our behalf. A perusal of the following program will show that the numbers selected should meet with the approval of musical epicures.

1.—MARCH	"The Carnival Queen"	Snyder
	—Orchestra	
2.—QUARTET	"La Di Dame"	Hermann
	—Orchestra	
3.—VOCAL SOLO	Selected	
	—By Mrs. C. L. Gridair	
4.—SELECTION	"In Poppyland"	Albers
	—Orchestra	
5.—RECITATION	Selected	
	—By Miss Muriel Bell	
6.—OVERTURE	"Light Cavalry"	F. Von Suppe
	—Orchestra	
7.—VIOLIN SOLO	"Capriccio"	Wm. Ten Have
	—By Mr. H. Mattinson	
8.—SELECTION	"The Garden Dance"	Vargas
	—Orchestra	
9.—VOCAL SOLO	Selected	
	—By Mr. A. Thorpe	
10.—SELECTIONS	(a) "Good as Gold"	
	(b) "My Carolina Home"	
	—Orchestra	
11.—OVERTURE	"Luspiel"	Keler Bell
	—Orchestra	
"GOD SAVE THE KING"		
H. MATTINSON,	ACCOMPANISTS:	
Director.	Miss Jean Alexander & W. H. Watts.	

This newspaper clipping from March 13, 1923, submitted by Kathryn Auger, gives us a glimpse into the cultural activity in the Town of Grande Prairie when the population was just a little over 1000 people. The concert was put on to raise funds for two Grande Prairie businessmen to travel to Ottawa and lobby for the development of the Peace River District. It is interesting that one of the accompanists is Miss Jean Alexander, none other than the mother of Margaret Bowes, who is mentioned in Margaret's story on page 17. She must have been a teenager at the time.

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Harold Raison

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Poohkay Farm records
Nick Poohkay

“The Big Bend” book records
George Lewchuk, Spirit River Museum

Rebekah Lodge Grande Prairie, and
Rebekah Lodge Spirit River
Rebekah Assembly of Alberta

Westendorf family photographs
Ralph Westendorf

Larson’s Garage (Eaglesham) records
Greg Donaldson

Depression Interviews by School Children
Ginger Alexander

1979 Miss Grande Prairie Pageant booklet
Irene Nicolson

Grande Prairie Rotary Club Membership records
Bob Wallace

“Fire in the Sky” documents and videos
Carol Lee Eckhardt

Anton & Maria Wozniak papers
Mathew Wozniak

New on Our Website

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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.

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