

# TELLING OUR STORIES

Volume 1, Issue 3, June 1, 2010

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## Inside This Issue:

Letter from the Editor	p. 2
Contact Information	p. 2
Central Peace Survey	p. 3
M.D. of Spirit River No. 133	p. 4
Memories from the Central Peace	p. 6
History of Rahab-Codesa	p. 8
The Townsite of Belloy	p. 10
Saved by My Mother	p. 12
Fatal Forest Fire	p. 14
Get Involved--100th Anniversary of the Edson Trail	p. 17
What Archives Do and Why	p. 18
Society & Member News	p. 19
Membership Renewal & Application	p. 20



*Above, the Catholic Mission at Spirit River Settlement (SPRA 394.02); below, the manse at "The Maples", the site of the Anglican Mission at Dunvegan (SPRA 394.32). See "Memories from the Central Peace," p. 6.*



## Seniors' Tea June 8, 2010

Come and enjoy the Seniors' Tea at the Grande Prairie Museum at 1:30, June 8. Karen Burgess and Gerry Rigler will be sharing the story of Dr. & Mrs. Forbes arriving in the Peace 100 years ago.

## Newsletter Subscription

An issue of this newsletter will be mailed to you four times a year if you are a member of the South Peace Regional Archives Society. The Membership Form is on the back of the newsletter.

## Grande Prairie Municipal Cemetery Tour

Join SPRA staff on a guided walk through the Grande Prairie Cemetery and discover the rich and interesting history of Grande Prairie and area through the lives and stories of its people.

7:00 p.m. Saturday July 24, or 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, July 28

Call the Archives at 780-830-5105 before July 16 to register (limit of 20 participants).

June 1, 2010

Dear Members & Supporters;

Our theme for this June issue of the newsletter is the Archival Records Survey that was done in the Central Peace district in the summer and fall of 2009.

Archival records are found in many places. Our Municipal governments archive their minutes and bylaws which record the decisions and actions at the local government level, as well as land records and many other kinds of records. Museums and historical societies often collect material specific to their region, organizations preserve their history, and many families have their own collections of photographs and documents.

Our goal in recording all the organizations which held archival records was to produce a report which would show researchers where our history is being stored and taken care of.

Although it was not the goal of the survey to gather archival material, there were some collections donated by individuals or organizations who wanted a safer place to store their portions of history. This newsletter is illustrated by some of the documents and photographs which were donated as a result of the survey.

We welcome the Municipal District of Spirit River as a partner in South Peace Regional Archives and are pleased to announce that their collection, dating from 1916-2001, is now open to researchers. The history and a description of the collection is summarized on pages 4-5. A fuller description is available on our website.

Thank you to all who joined in this survey. The published report will be available at municipal offices, local museums and libraries by Fall 2010.

Thank you also to Jean Rycroft and Fran Moore who contributed articles for this newsletter. We love to hear these stories, even when they are not the happiest memories.

Sincerely,  
Mary Nutting, Archivist  
South Peace Regional Archives

## 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.

# The Central Peace Survey

*by Bonnie Flintoff, Archival Records Surveyor*

In 2009, South Peace Regional Archives initiated the Central Peace Archival Records Survey to research and document the location and the custodians of historical records held by individuals, organizations, businesses and municipalities within the Central Peace River District of Alberta. The survey covered an area from the British Columbia border on the west, east to the Smoky River at Watino, north to where the Peace River flows and south to the Saddle Hills.

Over the summer and autumn of 2009, the surveyor contacted many organizations and individuals, and was met with various degrees of awareness regarding archival records and what kinds of documents were considered historically important. A major component of the project was education—informing organizations and individuals about South Peace Regional Archives. With the assistance of SPRA staff, we made presentations at Council Meetings for each of the 5 municipalities within the Central Peace. This was to inform them about the importance of saving historical materials and records for future generations, how records are handled at the Archives and how they are processed and stored for preservation. One municipality made the decision to archive records dating back to 1916, not only for preservation but to also free up storage space in their facility.

The collections viewed by the surveyor showed a broad range of history. The two museums, the Spirit River Settlement Historical Society and The Grizzly Bear Prairie Museum in Wanham, have collected valuable archival material from this area, and these records are available to researchers during museum hours.

Some of the individual collections show the transition from immigrant to Canadian. In the Central Peace we have many ancestors from the Ukraine,

Yugoslavia, Germany, Lithuania, and Croatia as well as many other European countries, including Britain. Some of the records and photographs dated back to the early 1800's; one collection contained the records of a grandfather who was a Factor with several Hudson's Bay Posts, including Spirit River.

Sadly, the Surveyor encountered one situation where records had been destroyed in a house fire; in another, records damaged by a flood had been thrown out. Still another individual had moved and 2 boxes of family historical records were thrown out as they didn't have room and didn't know that there was an Archives in Grande Prairie.

An Archives depends on people donating their historical records in order to build a record of the community's history for the benefit of present and future generations. Several individuals and organizations, including two History Book Societies and a Church, made the decision to send their records into the South Peace Regional Archives.

We appreciate the cooperation of the individuals, the organizations and the municipalities who participated in this survey. The Surveyor feels the final report only reflects a very small portion of the historical documents that are available throughout the Central Peace.

The conclusion of this project is that we need to revisit the means by which we get the message out about what an archives is, and what kinds of records are archival. We must emphasize the importance of preserving these records, and retrieve the ones which are in danger of being lost. The retrieval and documentation of these records at the earliest possible date is imperative.

# Municipal District of Spirit River No. 133

**Municipal District of Spirit River No. 133. -- 1917-2001. -- 5.01 m textual records; 4 photographs; 6 maps**

## *Agency History*

The Municipal District of Spirit River was incorporated on November 8, 1916 as the Rural Municipality of Spirit River No. 829. Then, it included only “*Twp. 77 Ranges 5 and 6, Twp. 78 Ranges 4, 5, and 6, and Twp. 79 Range 4, in Range 5 those parts south and east of Rat Creek, and the south half of Twp. 79 in Range 6, all W 6th.*” Before becoming a Rural Municipality, the area was part of Large Local Improvement District No. 829 and before December 18, 1913, Territorial Unit 829. The parts of Large Local Improvement District 829 not included in the M.D. were transferred to LIDs 800 and 830.

Less than a year after its incorporation, on May 15, 1917, the M.D.’s boundaries were expanded to include the part of Twp. 79 Ranges 5 and 6 between Rat Creek and the Kistuan River. Sometime before 1928, the municipality became known as a “Municipal District” rather than a “Rural Municipality,” and on April 1, 1945, it was re-numbered to become the Municipal District of Spirit River No. 133.

As of 2009, the M.D. of Spirit River includes 68,588 hectares of land and is bounded by Peace River to the north, Saddle Hills County to the south and west, and Birch Hills County to the east. The M.D. of Spirit River includes farmland and unincorporated communities like the hamlets of Wanham and Eaglesham. Although the Town of Spirit River and Village of Rycroft are within the M.D.’s borders, the M.D. is not responsible for their administration since they are independent urban municipalities. The local economy is founded on agriculture and related businesses. As of 1998, about 84% of land in the M.D. was agriculturally developed or improved. Other natural resources include oil and gas, lumber, gravel, hunting, and fishing.

The settlement history of the Spirit River area extends to long before the M.D. was established in 1916. During the 1800s, both the North West Company and the HBC had trading posts at nearby Dunvegan, across the Peace River from where Spirit River is now located. In the 1860s, Dunvegan also became the site of a Roman Catholic Mission. By the late 1800s, both farming and ranching were being done in the Spirit River area. In 1906, an Anglican mission was founded. The Spirit River area was surveyed for the Government of Canada in 1909 by J. B. Saint Cyr. Early settlers arrived primarily over the Long Trail and the Edson Trail. After the arrival of the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway (E. D. & B. C.) at Spirit River in 1916, settlement increased.

The first meeting of the Rural Municipality of Spirit River was held January 2, 1917 at the Spirit River Hotel (located at the Spirit River Station). The council was initially composed of five members, although the number of councillors was reduced to four in 1934. The first councillors were W. S. O. English, A. H. Parks, S. Mageau, J. A. Bell, and G. Galvin and the first Secretary-Treasurer was R. H. Rycroft. Mr. Rycroft’s home functioned as the municipality’s office until an office building was rented in 1918. The M.D. later bought an office building, which burned down in 1922. A new office was constructed after the fire and served until 1960 when the old Prestville School was moved to Spirit River and became the new municipal district office. In November 1983 another office was opened, followed by a new Public Work Shop in January 1984.

The M.D.’s first by-law was a Herd By-Law passed March 1, 1917. The By-Law aimed to stop livestock roaming free throughout the municipality. In 1918, a weed inspector and police officer were hired. By issuing

debentures, the M.D. was able to finance necessary road building in the municipality, meeting expenses for equipment and labour.

Over the years, the M.D. has been involved in providing various forms of assistance to its residents. For example, the M.D. helped with hospital and medical expenses during 1918 flu epidemic, provided seed grain advances to farmers during tough years, and made relief payments to many of its residents during the 1930s Depression. In fact, relief payments were the biggest expenditure of the M.D. through the 1930s with all other expenses being kept as low as possible.

By 1989, the M.D. was engaged in a number of activities, running an agricultural service board and a fire department and participating in the South Peace Regional Planning Commission, the Central Peace General Hospital Board, the Central Peace Seed Cleaning Association, the Municipal District Library Board, the Grande Spirit Foundation, the Agricultural Development Corporation, the Tourism Action Committee, and the Spirit River and Rycroft Recreation Boards. 1994 cutbacks in the Provincial Government and an amended Municipal Government Act caused the M.D. to assume control of its own planning and assessment services. Assessment services and some planning were contracted out, while minor planning was done by the M.D. itself.

As of 2009, services provided by and functions carried out by the M.D. include the Agricultural Services Board, Development Department, Family and Community Support Services (as a partnership between Province of Alberta, Alberta municipalities, and Metis Settlements), Emergency Services (volunteer fire department, member of the Central Peace Region – Emergency Management Agency, RCMP detachment at Spirit River), Public Works, Waste Management, and Taxation. The M.D. also participates in the Central Peace Health Council, Central Peace Medical Clinic Board, Central Peace Seed Coop, Disaster Services Committee, Family and Community Support Services, Grande Spirit Foundation, Inter-Municipal Relations Committee, Land Use Planning Steering Committee, M.D. Fire Department, Mighty Peace Tourist Association, Mountain Pine Beetle Project, Municipal Planning Commission, Peace Library System Board, Peace Region Economic Development Alliance, Personnel Committee, Senior Housing Projects, South Peace Regional Archives, South Peace Water Project, Subdivision & Development Appeals Board, and VSI Services Committee.

#### *Scope and Content:*

The fonds consists of records related to the administration and activities of the Municipal District of Spirit River including holding council meetings, passing by-laws, administering the M.D.'s finances, and assessing property and collecting taxes. The fonds also includes associated records containing historical information about the M.D. The material dates from 1917 to 2001 and includes records such as minutes, by-laws, financial statements, cash books, general ledgers, miscellaneous financial ledgers, assessment and tax rolls and forms, tax arrears lists, miscellaneous tax ledgers, road work maps, newspaper clippings and photographs.



*Opening of the M.D. office in 1983. Back row L-R: Ted Stoner, Kelly White, Ray Wiesenburger, Frank Zahara, John Sekulic, Lloyd Buck. Front Row L-R: Charlie Davidson, Lloyd Rosser, Vince Durda, Willie Zahara, Bill Chalus. SPRA photograph 550.04.02.01, used with permission of Peace Country Sun.*

# Memories from the Central Peace

The photographs on the cover and this page were preserved by the Lillico family and donated to the Archives during the recent archival survey.



*Left, The D.A. Thomas river boat was built in Peace River in 1915 by The Peace River Development Corp. founded by Lord Rhondda, David A. Thomas. In anticipation of oil production in the Peace, it was fitted with oil tanks. WW I hampered plans for oil transport but this riverboat provided transport up and down the Peace River until 1930. SPRA 394.03*

*Right, A photograph post-card of Cy Sutherland's students at Spirit River School District No. 3361 around 1919 standing on the board sidewalk in front of D.D. Brook's store. SPRA 394.15*



*Left, the Holy Cross Hospital in Spirit River, built in 1942, and operated by the Order of the Grey Nuns. SPRA 394.07*

Germany  
28/3/45

D 77 344 Sgt B. Murray  
# 3 Sqn. 2nd C.A.P. (S.F.)  
Cdn. Army Overseas

My dear Mrs Young, -

I have been intending to write you for some time now but due to the fighting and other things did not have the time. To begin with I was your son Reuben's Sgt. and was in the tank with him when he was killed, fortunately I was only wounded and am now back with the Regt again after spending ten weeks in the hospital.

The real reason I am writing is to send you this picture of Reuben's grave, its just north of a little village in Holland called Putte. However this is only a temporary grave. Later he will be moved to a large Cdn cemetery of which you will probably be informed. And you may rest assured that while he rests we he is now his grave will always be decorated with flowers as it is in this picture. These were placed there by the grateful people of Holland who will continue to do so as long as he lies there. I also wish you to know that he never suffered. He never knew what hit him he was firing the guns at the time we were hit which was about 12.30 noon the 21st of Oct. 1944.

Reuben was one of the best liked men in the Regt and in the Troop was the hardest worker and most conscientious man I had. He was my personal gunner and the best I've ever had. There never was a man I thought more for in the two years I knew him we were very close friends. He led a very straight life and I am sure when he meets his maker his plate will be clean.

And he died fighting for what was right. I might add that he thought the world of his sister. He often used to speak of her.

And now as I write you this letter the final phase of our battle with Germany is fast drawing to a close. I truly wish Reuben was here on German soil with me.

However he is here in spirit and may his spirit aim my guns for me again true to the mark so we strike the last final blow.

Forgive me for being sentimental but that's just how I feel.

Please write and let me know if you receive this letter and picture.

I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Bun.



World War 11 photograph of Reuben Erland Young taken by Renfield Studios in Scotland in 1941. SPRA 377.01

Nora Babuik, of Spirit River, submitted this photograph of her cousin Reuben who was killed in World War II, and a copy of this letter signed by Sergeant "Bun".

Reuben was born at Broncho Creek, near Spirit River and attended school there. When World War II began, he joined the army in the Governor General's Foot Guards. He was killed in action in the Scheldt Estuary Campaign on the Belgium-Netherlands border on October 21, 1944. He was buried in a temporary grave just north of the village of Putte, but later re-buried in the Bergen-op-zoom Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands.

# The History of Rahab-Codesa

*By Mathew Wozniak*

In 1916, Northern Alberta Railways laid rails by a siding called Rahab. There were very few roads so everything was shipped by rail. Charlie Brochu homesteaded on the portion of SE 25-78-1-W6th that was north of the track (NAR took the portion south of the track for a town site), and in 1930 Charlie opened a Post Office and Store. He was a generous storekeeper. People would say they need a few groceries but don't have the money, and he would let them charge it. I wonder how he managed with the wholesalers.

The church was built in the early 30s by many people, but the main carpenters were Joe Thibeault and Joe Bilinski, who spent most of the summer there.

A man who lived on the SW of section 12, about a mile east and 2 miles south, cut a trail through the heavy bush so he could get his mail. Whenever he saw a slough, he headed for it, didn't have to chop trees. Then he got thinking that if someone homesteaded on some of this land, his trail would be closed. He persuaded the district engineer to make it a legal road allowance. The survey plan (No. 2597CL) shows the legal road with its 22 corners from section 12 to the railway siding at Rahab.

In 1938, the Bishop of Grouard informed the Northern Alberta Railroad that 'Rahab' was a lady of ill repute in the Bible and that we should not glorify a prostitute by naming a town after her. The NAR took the first 2 letters of their officials Coldwell, Deacon and Sanders and came up with Codesa.

Charlie Brochu's store burned so the new one built was about 30 by 60 feet, with half being living quarters. In 1940, Rene Chamberland brought the store, it was still on the homestead north of the track, and since the NAR owned the town site and them thinking that this may someday be a metropolis, threatened to close that railway crossing if they didn't move to the south side of the track. Sam Bou-

dreau had donated the portion of his quarter that was south of the track to the church, so Rene made a deal with the church for a lot to put the store on when he moved it. A cemetery was made on a hill not far from the west end of this land, but after the church was closed, all the graves were moved to Eaglesham.

In 1935, Mrs. Harry Lukas was the first teacher in the Rahab School. It was actually in the Church, with large folding doors to close the altar off during school days. Keeping warm was a problem. A large barrel heater in the middle burned you on one side while the other side was cold. In 1936-38, J.P. Leblanc was the teacher and believed in the strap. After school he would correct all the work students did during the day and pupils got one strap on the palm for every error in the work. Mr. Leblanc retired in Codesa and died shortly after. In 1945, classes were held in the building in which Mrs. Roy, the teacher, lived (formerly the Girard residence just east of the church) because it was easier to heat. The building burned and Mrs. Roy suffered some injury. In 1947, the Spirit River School Division built a new school about 500 yards east of the church.

In 1955, Roger and Pierette Bouchard bought the NW 15-78-1-W6th just west of the church from Edgar Girard, and lived in the house there until 1963, when they built a new home.

In the fifties, Codesa was a thriving little town: two stores, Pete Warbucks was the other one, garage and residence by Pete Noga, grain elevator and residence, livestock shipping facilities, school, pool hall, cafe and community hall. Towns like Tangent, Eaglesham, Codesa, Belloy and Wanham would take turns having a sports day; each town had a baseball team. There were many more people at that time.

In 1936, Midland and Pacific Grain Co. built an elevator in Codesa, and Albert St. Jean was the first

grain buyer, then it was Rene Chamberland for many years. It looked like any elevator until, in 1940, they built a regular elevator alongside. That's when we found out that this old elevator held only about 18 thousand bushels. In 1954, the elevator was sold to United Grain Growers who built a residence for their buyer on the town site. Grain buyers were Gene Morin, S. Hornby, Harold Webb, W. Dechant and John Hawryluk.

The farmers that lived about 6 miles south of what is now Highway 49 had grain to deliver to an elevator. The only road at that time was about 6 miles west and about 9 miles north to Belloy. This would be too long a walk for horses to complete in one day. They could see a short cut—by clearing a trail through the Birch Hills on the road allowance directly south of Codesa, they could save about 6 miles. For most of the winter in about 1941, every morning there would be a string of 4 to 8 sleighs loaded with grain going to the elevator in Codesa. A team of horses could haul about 50 bushels. The next year someone, I believe it was Mr. Boetcher, bought a 2 ton Ford truck and hauled all. The truck could haul about 200 bushels and make 2 trips a day.

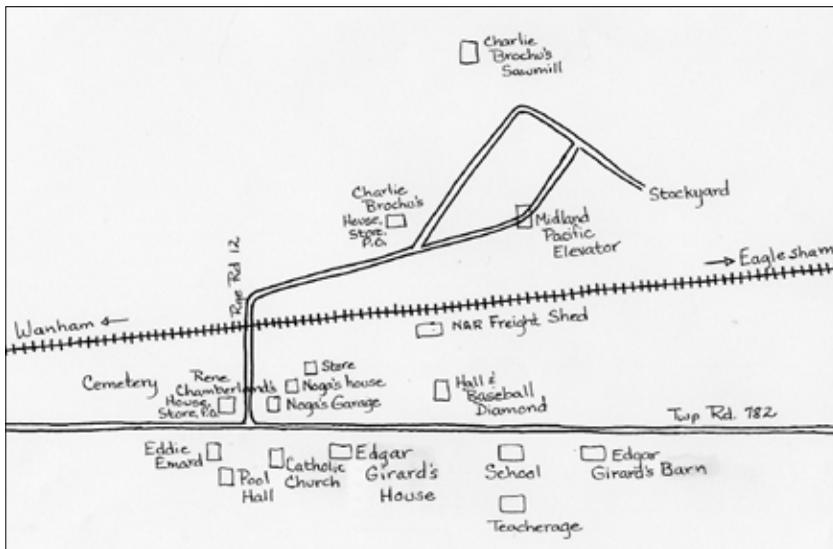
The elevator was closed in 1974 and the small portion was moved to the Allen Scott farm in Belloy while the large portion was moved to the Macklin farm, formerly Clarence Nordvie's. The school was moved to the Clarence Nordvie farm and became their home. Pete Noga's garage was moved to Eaglesham and became the office and shop for the UFA bulk station. The UGG residence was moved to Eaglesham. The church became unsafe so was torn down in about 1969. Podruzny bought the hall for the Wanham Legion, but it ended up on their farm as an implement shed.

The railway had not been running for many years and in the late 90s the rails were removed and the unusable railway ties were stored on the SW 23-78-1-W6, about a half mile east of the hamlet of Codesa and on the north side of the track.

In about 2005, all the elevators along the railroad were demolished as a large cement elevator had been built about 2 miles south of Rycroft. Some of these elevators were not very old. They would get a large backhoe to make a large hole at the bottom of an elevator, then the backhoe would go to the other side and push it over. A cat would move back and forth, breaking the wood into smaller chunks, and a loader would load it into trucks. They made a pit north of Codesa where they hauled and burned all the wood from an elevator in Tangent, two in Eaglesham, one in Belloy and three in Wanham. They said that they got about 22 tons of nails out of this pit.

At one time Codesa was a prosperous little hamlet, but now all that remains is a sign by Highway 49 with arrows pointing north and south that says "Codesa Road." A picture of the Codesa Church may be found in *Smoky Peace Triangle* on page 30, Chamberland's store on page 167, and the hall on page 16.

*Below, The Hamlet of Codesa between 1930 and 1950 as drawn by Morris Burroughs & Ray Thibeault.*







# Saved by My Mother (Bad Heart Fire)

*as told by Effie Berg to Jean Rycroft*

“We were terrified!! The fire was everywhere!”

“Mom put us on the ground, flat on our stomachs and told us to stay there. Then she took her dress off and covered us with it to protect us from the smoke and flame – because that was the only thing she had to use. I remember the whole sky was just red with fire – the fire was over us and on the ground and all around us. It was just terrifying! I can still hear the crackling and the popping. Mom and my older brother Winthrope took turns to stamp out any sparks that landed around us. But, we didn’t dare move because Mom was right there to tell us to keep down. The fire was surrounding the little spot of ground that my sister Joan (14 mos.), my brother Gordon (5 yrs.) and I (Effie, 7 yrs. at the time) were clinging to. At one point the top of a tree fell just inches from Gordon and me. Winthrope’s pant legs were burned off as he struggled to put out the flames. Mom just kept moving us around to keep us away from the fire. Mom and Wimpy guarded us all afternoon. Every time we tried to look up Mom would tell us to keep our heads down, and make sure we stayed covered with her dress. Finally the fire passed over us and we started the mile long walk out to Mike Stumpf’s. It was about ten o’clock at night by the time we reached there,” recalled Effie Berg recently.

The horrible fire Effie and her family lived through was the devastating bush fire that swept through from Webster to the Bad Heart on May 4, 1944, burning everything in its path. Two young men Raphael Klein and Tattoo Derocher, both lost their lives, three houses with all their contents and buildings, barns, granaries, seed and feed grain were destroyed, as well as pigs, chickens, horses, etc. Only the quick thinking and bravery of mother Fern Victoria Parker, determined to save her children against all odds, allowed Effie and her siblings to become survivors of the worst bush fire in the history of our region.

That morning began as an ordinary day. “Mom left with four of us children to go over to Dave and Gladys Ray’s to trade some butter for some flour. She was driving the team and wagon. While we were there the wind came up and Mom could see smoke so we left for home. We could see the fire on Mocking Bird Hill and the smoke was just black, black. We just got home and Arnold Sparks came over on horse-back to tell us to get out of there.”

“Mom didn’t even unhook the horses. She loaded the wagon with some food and put some blankets over us to protect us from the smoke, and we left right away. We could see the fire coming by then and the smoke was awful. That was about 2:30 pm when we left our house.”

“We didn’t get very far, only about one-half mile, when the horses were overcome with the smoke and dropped dead. Poor Mom! Here she was with four kids and we were now on foot! The only way that she managed to save us was that she remembered that Arnold Sparks had been burning bush piles the week before when one of the fires got away from him. It left a spot big enough for Mom to put us on the ground flat on our stomachs, and let the fire jump over us.”

“But first we had to get there. Keeping a close hold on each other, we began crawling forward. By hugging the ground, we were able to crawl the mile to the small haven from the choking smoke and searing heat.”

“Mom and Winthrope took turns stamping out any sparks that landed around us. Winthrope’s pant legs were burned off, and we found out later that Mom’s back was badly burned. We stayed there all afternoon and when the fire finally kind of burned down, we moved on until we finally came out at Stumpf’s. Someone got us some water to drink and we could wash and cool our faces, but there was nothing to eat as his house had burned down.”

“We then found out that the men were getting a search party together to come look for us. There was Abe Graham, Chris and Art Hennigar, Dave Ray, Dave Barber, Scottie Reid, Bruno Braumberger and Tom and Dave Hill.”

“Mom was blind from the smoke so Mike Stumpf took her by the arm and took her over to Chris and Gladys Hennigar’s. There we had something to eat and stayed over-night as we had no home to go to. Poor Mom didn’t even know until the next day if her other kids: Pat, George and Alma, were safe, as they had been at school when the fire broke out. They had no idea if we were safe or not. We found out the next day that Eric Rycroft had gone to the school and taken the kids home to his (and Reta’s) home.”

“The next day we were taken to Emma Webber’s and Jim Stumpf’s place and we stayed there at the store ( and post office) for the next three months until Mom got her eyesight back. Wimpy stayed at Hennigar’s. The Red Cross came out with clothes and food right after the fire. They were great. They came out at least two or three times per week to look after Mom’s eyes and back. She never did go to a doctor.”

“Also the RCMP were very good to come out and check up on us. They came out a few times just to make sure we were ok and that we didn’t need anything. Once they even brought some toys for my brother Gordon and I. They were so good to us.”

“Once in the winter they came out with a vehicle with cat-tracks on it. We were a long way from town and the road wasn’t good.”

“As soon as Mom got her eye-

sight back, she got to work building a log cabin for us to live in. The neighbours were good to help, and Wimpy, who was seventeen, was a big help. Even us younger kids helped, mudding with moss and mud. We were so glad to get back into our own home! We didn’t care if it was a log cabin!”

“I remember our first homemade bread. Oh, that was so good! It was cooked in a boiler and steamed on the heater as we didn’t yet have an oven to cook in. The dough was put in jam cans – and it was so good!”

“We never talked much about the fire, but I still have nightmares about it – all that noise and crackling and everything was red – and all that smoke! Even yet, if I see a young kid poking around in a fire, I just freak. I saw what can happen.”

The look on her face told me that Effie was right back in the ring of fire.

“To this day, I will always take my hat off to our Mother. I don’t know how she did what she did and saved us all – not only that day, but she raised ten of us on nothing and never asked a thing for herself.”

Such was the resilience of our strong pioneer women who rose to every challenge – especially when their children’s lives were at stake



*Effie holds the little dress she wore on that fateful day – with the burn holes still in it. Photograph courtesy of Effie Berg.*

# Fatal Forest Fire

by Jean Rycroft

The horrific Webster to Bad Heart bush fire on May 4, 1944 took the lives of two young teenagers from the area, Wilfred Derocher (18) and Raphael Klein (18).

Wilfred's niece Marj Lappenbush, with the assistance of Wildlife Prevention Officer Jeff Henricks, has managed to piece together much of the story of her uncle's death.

Jeff shared what they have been able to determine to date. "The two boys were good friends. Raphael came from the Webster area, and Wilfred's family had moved from the Bad Heart area into Grande Prairie. The morning of the fire, Wilfred, Raphael and Stanley Krzyczkowski and three other men, were picked up in the Webster area by Jesse Sanborn and driven out to Sanborn's Mill. Forest Ranger Sherman "Trix" Willis had sanctioned the hiring of these six men to help fight an impending bush fire."

Little did the two young men realize that what seemed to be a simple way to make some money would cost them their lives.

About 11:00 a.m. the men arrived at the Sanborn Mill.

"When the people at the mill saw the smoke in the distance and knew there was a fire, they sent out a native rider, Sam Badger who worked for Jesse, to see which way the fire was going. He came racing back and warned them, 'We've got to get out of here, it's coming right towards us,' added Marj.

The following details of this story were taken from Mildred Sanborn's story in "Wagon Trails Grown Over," published by Sexsmith to the Smoky Historical Society, 1980, pgs. 75-76.

*When listening to the radio that morning, Mildred had learned that the Grande Prairie Airport reported the highest winds to ever be recorded up*

*to that date, and everything was tinder dry. The Sanborns were already nervous because there were small fires burning along the railroad track to the north of Webster, and also in Frank Donald's timber berth. In a very short time, the small fires were fanned into a raging forest fire, destroying everything in its path.*

*"We were struggling back and forth with buckets of water in a bucket brigade in an attempt to dampen down the roofs of the buildings, when the crew arrived to help. Even with all their efforts, by 1:00 pm it was obvious that they would not be able to contain the fire, as it had crossed the Bad Heart River and there was no stopping it.*

*"Because of the high winds, it would crown and burn in the tops of the trees first, then balls of fire would fall down and burn swiftly back along the ground."*

*"We had a large clearing around the mill and the buildings, but with so much wind and spark, it was impossible to save anything. Sparks had landed on the cook shack and started it on fire and the barn roof was also on fire in several places. The two boys were assigned to look after the cook shack. Jesse then remembered the horses and raced to the barn and kicked some of the boards from the back wall to free the horses." (Surprisingly, all the horses made it to safety).*

*"We were all beginning to feel the effects of the clouds of acrid smoke that were settling about the clearing. We knew we could not save the camp and had to concentrate on saving our own lives. Our only hope of escape was to reach the (small) dam on the nearby river [what is referred to as a river was actually an ephemeral draw - a creek with no banks. The dam was man-made by the previous owner Jack Lamar as a source of water for the mill and horses]. Once there we could lie down, which would give us some protection from the smoke*

*which was burning our lungs and from the almost unendurable, scorching heat waves.”*

*“It was quickly decided that everyone should get to the edge of the dam where, by lying down on the ground, one could breath. At that time there was Jesse, myself, Bob Sanborn (Jesse’s brother), and a young man who was going to help Jesse haul some lumber with the truck [Len Rode], and the six men the ranger sent in. Everyone was together when we started for the dam, only a short distance away, but the smoke was so dense it was easy to get separated.”*

*“When we left the clearing, the smoke was so thick we couldn’t see. Fighting back panic, we groped blindly, travelling by instinct, and followed the slope of the land to the river (more of a draw). We finally saw the outline of the dam and threw ourselves on the ground at the edge of the water. There was no time to count heads; there was a series of explosions. The fire had reached the gas barrels and truck tires. Debris was thrown into the air and we kept our heads down and prayed it would not land near the dam.”*

*“We believe that may be when the three young men got more frightened and decided to try to get away. Unfortunately, they went in the wrong direction, and into the heaviest part of the timber, where the heat and smoke would be insufferable.”*

May 11, 1944 edition of The Herald Tribune stated:

*“The fire, fanned by a wind almost cyclonic in proportion, swept through the Sanborn Mill Site, nine miles north-east of Webster. The survivors of the fire avoided certain death by getting into a small dam located at the mill and then walking out through dense bush to reach the Webster settlement.”*

Mildred Sanborn continues, *“When things had quieted down and the smoke began to lift, Jesse counted heads and checked for injuries. Three young men the forestry department had sent to the camp, Stanley Krzyczkowski, Raphael Klein and Tattoo (Wilfred) Derocher, were missing.*

*“The rest of us stayed near the water until the smoke had cleared some. We could see that the fire had not gone into the poplar ridge to the south of us, so we walked in that direction. We walked about five miles to the Webster Trail, near Rode’s home, and one of the Steeves’ boys picked us up and drove us to the doctor in Sexsmith. It was 5:00 pm by then.”*

Marj mused, “They don’t know why the boys, Wilfred, Raphael and Stanley, tried to get out the way they did – whether they lost their way due to the heavy smoke or whether they didn’t realize that the others had gone to the dam or for some other reason known only to them. We’ll never know. All three started to run, and then the only survivor of the three, Stan remembers looking back and the last thing he saw was that Raphael had fallen down. He believed he had run into a tree in the smoke, or fallen over a stump. He thought he (Raphael) had knocked himself out. Wilfred turned back to try to save his friend and that was all Stanley could tell them.”

There was already fire between Stanley and the two boys. In one interview it was stated that all three stumbled as they got started.

*“Wilfred chose to try to save his friend rather than run to try to save himself. They found the bodies the next day, only about 10 yards from the mill site clearing. Wilfred was lying over Raphael trying to shield his friend with his body. We have always hoped that the smoke got them before the fire.”*

What a valiant attempt to save the life of a friend!

*“Wilfred was a very good singer and had won a trophy for singing over CFGP radio. The St. Joe’s choir sang at the joint funeral held for the two friends, and some of their other school chums served as pall bearers. The boys were buried within meters of each other in Grande Prairie Cemetery.”*

According to the same Tribune, “Coroner A. E. Galway decided that an inquest was unnecessary as both deaths were accidental.”

Stanley Krzyczkowski, after stumbling through the fire and bush, somehow made it to the Bad Heart River, which he followed to Webster. Joe Hancharyk took him to Doctor Gamey in Sexsmith. Jack Neyes of the Ford Dealership drove him to Grande Prairie Hospital, where he spent over three months recuperating. It was a miracle he lived!

He was only 20 or 21 at the time, and must have been a very strong young man. It was thought by some that the fact he was wearing a leather jacket saved him from even more severe burning, but his hands, feet and face were very badly burned.

Marj reminisced "Daddy (Edmond Derocher) was overseas at the time and he always worried if he had made the right decision in discouraging his younger, and only, brother Wilfred from joining up. He wanted to enlist, but Daddy wouldn't let him as he thought he was too young, and might get hurt, so he told him to stay home and look after his Mother. That always bothered Daddy."

In the fall of 2008, the Derocher family was contacted by Alberta Government officials to advise them that the Fallen Wildland Firefighter Memorial had been constructed at their Hinton Training Centre. They invited the Derocher family to attend the dedication ceremony on September 20, 2008.

The family very proudly attended to see Wilfred's and Raphael's names on the plaque. However, since then Marj has been very dedicated to searching for a picture of Raphael, as none was available for the ceremony. Raphael rests in an unmarked grave. It is unknown if a marker ever existed.

If there is anyone reading this that has a picture of Raphael Klein, please contact Marj Lappenbush at 780-568-3951.

As a further note to the above, Alberta Government officials, following much research work by Wildfire Prevention Officer Jeff Henricks, have had the names of Raphael Klein and Wilfred Derocher included on the Fallen Wildland Firefighter Memorial in Ottawa. Jeff also plans to have a marker erected at the site where the young

men died.

"Greater love hath no man than he who would lay down his life for a friend." John 15:13.

My thanks to Wildlife Prevention Officer Jeff Henricks from the Alberta Government for all his help and assistance in reviewing this story and adding where permitted to share. We very much appreciate your time and advice Jeff.

If anyone has further stories about the fire please contact me, Jean Rycroft at 780-568-3894 and I will pass the information along to Jeff, who is still working on the story.

*May 4, 2010 marked the 66th anniversary of this fire.*



*Wilfred Derocher ca. 1940. SPRA 2010.26.  
Photograph donated by Chad Derocher.*

# Get Involved--100th Anniversary

## Edson to Grande Prairie Trail

by Fran Moore

Tough? Yes, tough was the word for this infamous trail which allowed a shorter distance to reach the desired Peace Country. The train had arrived in Edson from Edmonton and was heading west, now all we need is a trail north and we won't have to go around by Lesser Slave Lake.

Tough? The thousands of homesteaders and settlers that came over this trail had to deal with the cold and the snow of winter, or the mosquitoes, many hills and rivers, muskeg and mud in summer. This did not stop the pioneers who settled in the South Peace from coming. They came on horseback, with wagons or sleighs, using oxen or horses.

For five short years, 1911 to 1916, those hardy people came over this tough trail, some taking months to make it through to Sturgeon Lake and then west to "la Grande Prairie". The freighters traveled the trail many times. The trail went into disuse when the railroad finally reached Grande Prairie in 1916.

There have been some stories written in the local history books across the area, and the DeBolt & District Pioneer Museum published the book, Edson to Grande Prairie Trail, in 1988, celebrating the influence that the trail had on the area east of the Smoky River. This book is available today in its second printing. Then in 2003 the Edson Trail Historical Society was formed, out of Valleyview, and they did a very good job of telling the story in video. In 2009 a group of artists painted pictures to tell the story of the trail.

In 2011 there will be a Centennial Celebration honoring these pioneers. The Edson Trail Historical Society Centennial Celebration Committee are working on interesting projects and special activities to mark the occasion:

a) a major BBQ event at Evergreen Park, Tec Centre on July 23, 2011.

b) a "homestead rock" cairn (or wall) built from rocks engraved with pioneers names, date and land location (for details on this project contact Henry Morgan 568-4252).

c) a collection of more Edson to Grande Prairie Trail stories. Did your parents, grandparents tell you any trail stories, please write them down (then contact Fran Moore 957-3957).

d) a trail ride from Edson to Grande Prairie, summer '11 (contact Bruce Elliott 539-9137).

e) a special display about the trail at the Heritage Discovery Centre, Centre 2000, which will include maps, photos and so much more.

If you are a 'descendant of a trail pioneer' or you are just interested in our local history, we invite you to get involved - take part. For all these activities to happen we need volunteers and participation. Watch for further information and advertising in your local papers.

The book (at \$35) and the video (at \$100) are available, contact Grande Prairie or DeBolt museums to purchase these.



*Photograph of Gust Berg donated by the DeBolt Museum. See page 19.*

# What Archives Do and Why We Do It

*Author's Note: Last issue I wrote about how archives are different from libraries. This issue's article follows along the same lines. Once again, we are requesting questions about archives from our readers for inclusion in future issues. If we don't receive any submissions, you will continue having to read whatever I choose to write, however uninteresting! If you missed last month's exciting installment, check out our newsletters online at <http://www.southpeacearchives.org/newsletters.htm>.*

Having read last issue's article on some of the basic differences between libraries and archives, you are ready to move onto a different, although related, topic. Have you ever wondered how archives are different from museums? They both deal with old stuff, right? Partially true, but there's a lot more to it than that.

Never fear. This handy column is here to help guide you through the often confusing sea of cultural and heritage institutions. Here's a few of the key differences between archives and museums:

Museum collections are usually composed mostly of physical objects or artifacts.

Archives mostly collect records, rather than artifacts. Records can include paper and electronic documents, photographs and images, moving images, audio recordings, maps and plans, etc. If an archives does accept an artifact, it is most likely because that artifact has a strong connection with the other records in a collection (or as we call it, a fonds).

Once the items are acquired by the museum, they are frequently exhibited according to a theme. Usually, those objects which are not on display at a particular time are not accessible to the public.

Archives are designed so that researchers can come in and look at whatever they want, taking into consideration of course legal- and donor-imposed restrictions and conservation concerns. Some archives do displays of some of their material, but they are much less extensive than those produced by museums and are usually focused around photographs and documents rather than artifacts.

An admission fee is charged by most museums.

The material held by an archives is open for examination without paying any kind of fee. Archives usually charge only for the reproduction of materials, such as photocopies of documents or prints of photographs, or for lengthy research requests if the researcher is not able to come in themselves and work with the records.

So next time you have a question about where to find something or you have something to donate, you'll have a better idea of where to direct your inquiries. Plus, armed with your new knowledge, you'll have a ready response if someone ever says "Aren't archives the same as museums?"

**NEED A GUEST SPEAKER?  
WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT  
ARCHIVES?**

**SPRA Staff will speak on various aspects related  
to the subject of Archives  
to groups within the South Peace.  
Give us a call at 780-830-5105**

# Society and Member News

## Thank you, Hans Adomeit!

for translating the Gust Berg documents from Swedish to English. The main document was a record of employment from "Public Works of Norrland" for Gust when he was a general labourer at road construction. He left his job on August 11, 1921 to emigrate to Canada. (See photograph of Gust Berg donated by the DeBolt Museum on p. 17)

## Apology to Burnt Embers Committee

Sincere apologies to the members of the Book Committee who published Burnt Embers: a history of Woking and district in the Burnt River Valley. I used their book to research the History of the Burnt River Valley for the first edition of this newsletter and did not credit them. You would think an archivist would know better.

Mary Nutting, editor

## A GRANDE EDUCATION

Now available from SPRA, the County of Grande Prairie, and Beth's Books, this book is a history of schools in the County of Grande Prairie, including over 100 one-room schools.

240 pages and 401 photographs/illustrations.

Retail Price \$30.00

Members' Price \$24.00

## A Few of Our Recent Acquisitions

*Vivien Dechief*

Bay Tree Community records & photos

*Stan Neufeld*

Hockey Legends books & photos

*Doug Mariner*

1918 School Register, Lake Saskatoon High School

*Paul Gerow*

Buffalo Lake Community Society

*Merv Staggs*

Photos of Road Construction, Dunvegan, 1954

*Rhonda Yaskowich*

Lambert School & Lymburn Community photos

*Ed Rode*

North Kleskun Community Association Records

## Last Chance!

to reclaim your original negatives and personal photographs taken by

Paul Pivert of **Panda Camera's**

**House of Portraits**

and

**Studio on the Park**

between 1964 and 2003.

Your request must be made by

June 15th, 2010

and picked up by June 30th, 2010.

For more information contact

South Peace Regional Archives

(780) 830-5105

spra.photos@telus.net

# South Peace Regional Archives Society Membership Application Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Interested in being involved as a \_\_\_\_\_ volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ board member

There are two types of membership:

Full memberships are for individuals who want to be involved in the society, allowing them to attend meetings, vote on issues and run for office.

Associate memberships are for individuals who want to receive communications from the society to keep them updated on happenings at the Archives, but not attend meetings.

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: 831-7371  
E-mail: [spra@telus.net](mailto:spra@telus.net)