

# TELLING OUR STORIES

Volume 3, Issue 4, September 1, 2012

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*Above, "Bathtub Races on the Bear Creek Reservoir in 1969", from the Panda Camera collection (SPRA 1809.11). Processing of this collection, a year-long project, is now complete. See pages 4-5 and 14-18 for more information.*

*Don't Miss the 2012 Film & Story Tea, see page 20 for details.*

September 1, 2012

Dear Members & Supporters;

September again, the last issue of Volume Three of this newsletter. We are pleased to see it listed under in "Documentary Heritage News", which is a list of worldwide, archives-related publications and news, compiled by David Rajotte of Library & Archives Canada.

The theme for this issue is the City of Grande Prairie. The articles are mostly about the history of the Bear Creek Flats and Panda Camera.

Although we know that the Bear Creek Flats was used as a camping and fishing site by First Nations, probably for centuries before European settlers arrived, our records only begin after the creation of the townsite of "Grande Prairie City".

The Panda Camera collection covers a much later time period, from 1964 to 2002. We are so pleased to have this extensive photographic record of more recent times. Normally, donors do not think of passing along historical records until they are at least 50 years old. Remember that events are "history" immediately after they have occurred.

To lighten up this very serious discussion of history, I have added a little story called "The Scrambola". It was written by Dick Lewis, father of Fred Lewis, our local piano tuner. Although Dick only lived in Grande Prairie for a short time in the 1930s, this story gives a picture of how people enjoyed adventure with very little money during the Depression. Dick's widow, Ursula, now lives in Grande Prairie and has been volunteering at the Archives for the past five years.

For more information on any of these collections, simply visit our website at [www.southpeacearchives.org](http://www.southpeacearchives.org) and type in the name of the principal character.

We hope, as usual, that you enjoy what we have at the Archives, and don't forget about the Film and Story Tea on October 14th!

Sincerely,

Mary Nutting, Archivist

## TELLING OUR STORIES

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South Peace Regional Archives Society

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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.

## What Do You Remember about the Bear Creek Flats?

One of Bill Scott's Potpourri Articles in the Daily Herald in December 2011 mentioned the history of the Bear Creek Flats and the families who lived there. As usual with Bill's articles, it got people talking, and we received some good information from the readers of his column. Then we dug around in the Archives and came up with a bit more.

The resources were scattered, but they were there: the 1920-21 tax roll from the City of Grande Prairie, transcribed by volunteers from the Grande Prairie Genealogical Society, photographs from 1916-1930 donated by Leo & Kathryn Auger, the 1959 "Report on Central Park" by the Peace River Planning Commission, and the 1965 Henderson Directory which lists the residents on each lot, including those in Bear Creek Flats.

Archives staff Karen Burgess worked with her husband Ken, who had grown up on the verge of the valley and (mis)spent his boyhood in the valley, to draw a map. Volunteer Kathryn Auger contacted Norman Burleau to contribute his memory of where things were.

Peggy Mair had suggested gathering the histories of the families who lived in the park, but since there is no community history book for the town and city of Grande Prairie, there is also no history of the residents of the valley. There are a few stories scattered around in other history books, however.

The story of George and Victoria Plante, whose basement beside the current creek has the interpretive sign for the Flats, is in Along the Wapiti, but under the name LaPlante. Victoria was a Calliou, an Iroquois Cree family which settled around Flying-shot Lake in the late 1800s.

Other history books contain the stories of William Sharpe in Pioneers of the Peace, Adam Kenney in Along the Wapiti; Guy Ireland in Beaverlodge to the Rockies; and Earle Watt in Along the Wapiti.

There are also collections at the archives which can be researched: the Dolly Lanctot Auger fonds with photographs of the Flats, the Argonaut Co. fonds, which includes a 1916 report on Bear Creek and Bear Lake, and the Town of Grande Prairie fonds with correspondence and documents from the 1930s, to name a few.

Another source is newspaper articles. Volunteers Kathryn Auger and Leita Askiw are transcribing the Isabel Campbell cards which index the Grande Prairie Herald-Tribune and its predecessors from 1913 to 1962 by name. We found Fred Abbott's obituary in the GP & District Genealogy Society obituary collection housed at the Archives.

And finally, we don't want to forget our own research. The first edition of this newsletter carried a photo of the Grendys family who lived in the park, along with a poem written by grand-daughter Erin Moure. In that same issue was the diagram of "the old swimming hole" which corresponded to a hand-drawn map by Norman Burleau.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, this is what I love about archives--a little donated here, a little there, and soon we can piece together a history for all of us.

What do you remember about the Bear Creek Valley? I remember sliding down the un-mowed grassy hills on strips of cardboard in the summer, and the snowy slope behind St. Joe's Academy in the winter. I also remember tripping through the flats on my way to the stock car races on the other side of the valley.

Do you have any photographs of the families or events down in Bear Creek park? Do you have any written memories? Why not share them through the Archives?

# Panda Camera fonds

**Panda Camera fonds. -- 1964-2002. -- 1.06 m of textual records. -- 31,015 photographic images.**

## Agency History

Panda Camera was originally established in June 1964 by Orm Shultz. The first location was on Richmond Avenue in Grande Prairie, but it drew customers from across the south Peace River country. As a combination photo studio and store, Panda Camera sold everything from photography books and magazines to movie cameras and slide projectors, as well as cameras, accessories, film, darkroom equipment and supplies, and display materials. It also carried related equipment such as surveying instruments, mobile telephones, binoculars and calculators, and over the years became the authorized dealer for Hasselblad, Besseler, Tamron, Polaroid, Nikon, Minolta, Yashica, Kodak, Pentax, Canon, Vivitar, and Durst.

In December 1966 Paul Pivert joined the Panda Camera team. He went on to train as a professional photographer, and in 1973 became the sole owner of a new company, Panda Camera (1973) Ltd.

In 1976, Mr. Pivert split the business into two divisions: Panda Camera, the camera store, which remained in the main business section of Grande Prairie and "House of Portraits", the portrait studio. The studio was moved to a historic home built in 1928 by Joseph Crummy on the corner of 102 Street and 102 Avenue. The name of the studio changed in 1983 to "Studio on the Park," to reflect the image of the new urban Muskoseepi Park, the entrance of which was just across the street from the studio. After operating for 26 years, the studio closed in 2002.

The camera store, while undergoing many changes, always retained the name of Panda Camera. In April 1984, same day processing was introduced through the Rapid Lab, state-of-the-art equipment from Hope Industries with computerized colour

control and enlargement capabilities to 8 x 10. In the early 1990s it was moved to the Co-op Store, and in 1996, sold to Diane Laurin. The business still operates as Snapshot Studio & Photo just across the street from Panda Camera's original location on Richmond Avenue.

## Scope and Content

The fonds consists of the photographs and business records of Panda Camera. The photograph portion of the fonds contains 2461 files (31,015 images) of portraits, business, and community photographs. The business records portion of the fonds consists of records relating to the carrying out of photographic assignments; reference materials for technique and processing; marketing, promotional and advertising materials; and the organizational records needed to sustain the company, including legal and planning documents, annual reports, financial records, and materials related to studio management and personnel.

*Editor's Note: The Photograph series of this fonds is divided into the following two sub-series.*

## Community Photograph sub-series

The sub-series consists of 1994 files of community photographs (25,228 images) of events such as theatre productions, graduations, confirmations, conventions, reunions, anniversary celebrations, visiting dignitaries, political events, opening celebrations, parades, trade shows, tournaments, and sports; businesses and organizations; and community figures such as politicians, community board members, doctors, lawyers, etc. The community files were removed by the Archives from the complete Panda Camera collection and selections made of the best photographs from within each of the files. As far as possible, original order was maintained and the original file number recorded in the description.

## Personal Portraits sub-series

The sub-series consists of 467 files of personal photographs (5788 images) including weddings, graduations, family and personal portraits, pets, and passports. The first 151 files consist of photographs and negatives from families and individuals who claimed their original files, but elected to donate images back to the Archives. After the community files were removed from the complete Panda Camera collection, the personal files remaining were sampled and every 33rd file was kept in its entirety (316 files). As far as possible, original order was maintained and the original file number recorded in the description.

## Paul's Story

When Paul was interviewed for the City's 50th Anniversary, he gave a little of his own history as well as the company's history.

*My dad was an avid photographer, along with Uncle Maurice. My brother came back from Korea at the end of the war with a brand new Contax 2a, still a fabulous collector's camera, and he gave me his old folding Kodak. I had already been studying photography from our books out on the farm, then taking pictures of the dog and stuff like that, and then of the family as time went on. I'd go to school, and take pictures of the kids on the bus, and at school, and then on to high school, on the grade 12 yearbook. Then I went to the School of Agriculture in Fairview and did the yearbook photography up there for two years. I also coordinated portraiture for the local photographer, Ziggy Soroco. When I finished college and came back home, I applied to the research station at Beaverlodge and ended up doing photography there.*

*Meanwhile, Orm Shultz had opened Panda Camera in June of 64. I had been going to see Griff James and Ron Paquin and Rex Harper (Art Craft Studios) so I was putting together photographic equipment from various places—a used Kodak, maybe twin reflex lenses—from here and there. So*



*when Orm opened up Panda Camera, I'm hanging around there a lot and I would help him with photofinishing just for fun. And he asked me to come and help him over Christmas in 1965, I think, and I helped over Christmas, and he had some other chaps, but he lost a photographer in November 67. He said, would you like to come and work for me. And I thought well, I could stay with government and be fairly secure, but let's give free enterprise a shot, see what happens.*

*So I went to work for Panda Camera as photographer and sales clerk, and I went around the country, up to Fahler to do weddings or whatever, up to McLennan, Spirit River various places like that. I'd go out for the weekend—out Friday night, and Saturday would be the wedding. I'd do the wedding, starting at about 10 in the morning, wrap it up about 4:00 the next morning, when the bride and groom finally left, and that was my work. Sometimes I'd be out in the middle of nowhere, and I'd say, where do I go out here? At that same time, after college, I'd also been doing as an A.I. technician. So, it ended up I'd do some farming at the farm, breeding cows on Sunday, working at the camera store on Friday nights and Saturdays, and back to the research station five days during the week. So it kept me fairly steady, and the photography carried on, and in 73 I ended up, with the assistance of a photofinishing firm in Edmonton, buying Panda Camera from Mr. Shultz and launching out on my own.*

## The “Scrambola”

Fred and Bertha Lewis, with their three teenage sons Jack, Dick, and Cecil, arrived in the Grande Prairie area in the spring of 1931. They filed on homesteads in the Sturgeon Lake area, but then rented a home in Grande Prairie. Fred was a piano tuner and found a job working for Bill Pratt and Jimmy Oliver, who had brought in a carload of old pianos that needed reconditioning before they could be sold. Jack had finished Normal School and began teaching at Berwyn, Dick started grade ten at Grande Prairie High School, and Cecil attended Montrose Public School.

The following story was written by Dick and took place after he graduated from high school. He went on to become a piano tuner, as did his son Fred, who still tunes pianos in Grande Prairie. The story is taken from A Piano Love Affair, a collection of memories compiled by Dick and Ursula Lewis, which is in the Archives library. Ursula is a volunteer at the Archives and the story is reproduced with her permission.



Left, Jack Penson's band, L-R Cecil Lewis, Winston Tibbets, Bill Remple, Mel Rodacker, and Dick Lewis at the Capitol Theatre. SPRA 195.09.



Fred and Bertha Lewis and three teen-age sons arrived in the Grande Prairie area in 1931 in a 1927 touring car pulling a trailer with camping supplies. This photo was taken in 1941. SPRA 195.02.

### SCRAMBOLA

I travelled with Dad intermittently, piano tuning in the Peace River country, but finished my High School in Grande Prairie in 1935. School over, we were hooked by the wanderlust. Keith Falconer, Cecil and I decided to take a trip out of Grande Prairie if we could find a car. We finally found an old 1926 Star for \$50.00. (I had some money from playing dances and with the boys' few dollars it added up to \$50.) It needed some remodeling which we did in our spare time and we got a deal on some "Chinese Red" paint! I worked on the engine even to changing the piston rings and it ran like a charm. We christened her "Scrambola."

Now we needed some spending money so we all got jobs of one kind or another, and I had started playing in Jack Penson's orchestra. At three or four dollars a dance it took a lot of dances plus working

for I.V. Macklin raking hay along with the mosquitoes!

August 1st we started out and headed for the mountains via Lesser Slave Lake, Edmonton, Pigeon Lake, Calgary and Banff. (Remember that these were the days of gravel and mud roads, no pavement.) We were quite a hit with the tourists at the Banff Springs Hotel. Our Chinese red car caught their eye. We did the circle tour to Lake Louise, Golden, Radium and camped at Lake Moraine, the Valley of the Ten Peaks. I remember the last night we were at Lake Moraine was August 22, 1935—the first time Social Credit came to power.

The car had run beautifully until we hit a bad hole in the road leaving Wetaskiwin. The car started to bang so we went back to the town and pulled in at a blacksmith's shop. He spotted our broken spring and found us one for 65¢, which he installed. That was our total expense other than gas and oil. We burnt twenty-cent gas (per gal) and it didn't use oil because I had changed the rings. So we arrived home for the 1st of September safe and sound after a great experience.



In 1935, Dick Lewis, Cecil Lewis, and Keith Falconer bought a 1926 "Star Engine" car and split it in half to lengthen it with scrap metal (probably to accommodate their long legs).

They called it their "Scrambola" and took it on a trip from Grande Prairie to Banff and back in the summer of 1935. It was painted fire engine red and instead of a horn, a fire bell was used to announce their arrival. SPRA 195.14, 15.



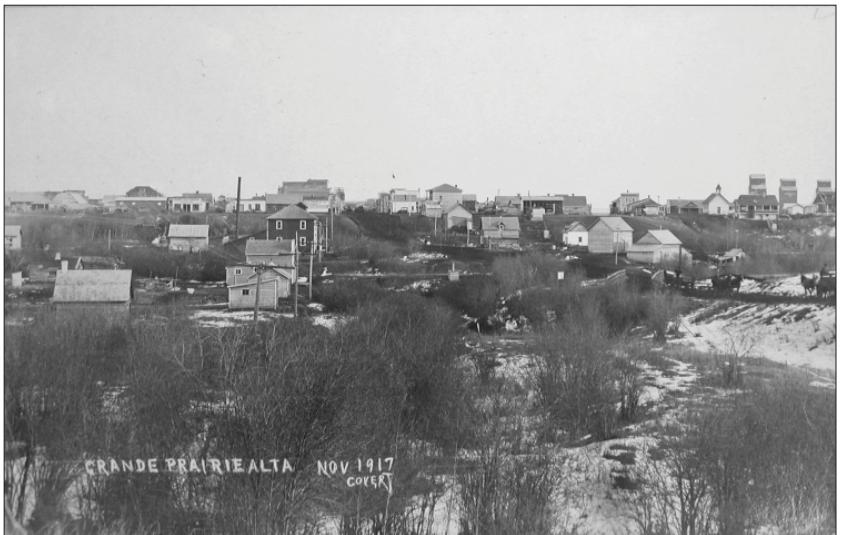
# The History of the Bear Creek Flats

The Bear Creek Valley was part of the original townsite of Grande Prairie, laid out in 1910 under Plan 1410 AC by the Argonaut Company. Although the photograph on the right is from 1917, the earliest tax records we have are from 1920-1921. According to these records (transcribed by our local Genealogical Society and available on our website), the lots in the valley north of Richmond Avenue (Blocks 9 to 16) were still mostly held by the Argonaut Company. This was not surprising as many of the lots were uninhabitable.

There was however, a blacksmith shop owned by W N Mills about half-way down the hill and one lot north from the road, and Taylor & Shaver, Millers, near the bottom of the hill along the main road.

There were already a few homes in the flats at that time. Individual land owners listed in the tax records included Tah & Sun Wong, Alphaeus St. Germain, Charles Spencer, and Oliver Johnson. So it was a multicultural community even then.

South of Richmond Avenue is Plan 7517PB, with Block 1 closest to the Main Street and Block 2 to the south. The plan is titled "Mission Heights". The 1921 records show most of this part of the valley belonging to three members of the Cook family (presumably Cook's Mill) and to Joseph Voz who owned the Grande Prairie Flour Mill. West across the creek, the low land had been reserved for the



Department of Public Works at the Town of Grande Prairie. Other lots in Block 1 belonged to Father Arsene Alac and the Catholic Church, presumably the "Mission" referred to in the title.

There are later City Tax records, still stored at City Hall, which could trace the ownership of the lots on the Bear Creek flats, but for this article we will stop with the 1921 records.

Early photographs of the valley are also evidence of what was there. The Lanctot-Augur collection at the archives shows the Lanctot home in the creek valley, the current mill beside the creek, and the old Catholic Cemetery on the west bank. A photograph donated by Leonard Toews shows the flooded valley in 1935; two of those homes were then occupied by the Toews family.

Over the next decades, the records are mostly from the memories of those who lived in the area. Norman Burleau's memories were mostly from the 1940s: the swimming holes--one for the girls, one for the boys--created by damming up Bear Creek before the dam was built; the Lanctot home which burned in 1937, and Dan's Greenhouses which were later built on that site.

Ken Burgess' memories were from the 1950s, with many of the same people still occupying



the same homes as in the 1940s. It was from his remarkable memory that the map (overpage) was drawn. He remembered almost every home ca. 1955, as well as the location of the twin hockey arenas.

Ken's memory was corroborated by the Henderson Directories which were produced for the City of Grande Prairie for the first time in 1965. On Richmond Avenue this record shows Albert Freeborn, Marshall Cheneweth, Mildred Bliss, Clive Ireland, Earl Watt, Leonard Heikel, George Plante, Lief Madsen, Adam Kenny, Alden Sedore, Norah Milliken, John Garrett, E Michaels, Arth Charlebois, and Anita Auger still living alongside Richmond Avenue. Some of these are along a small road on the other side of Bear Creek.

In the flats themselves the directory shows Jack Johnston, Ethel Guitard, Mivie Thomas, N Good-enough, Arnold Heucher, James Kimmerly, James Willard, and Orville Willard.

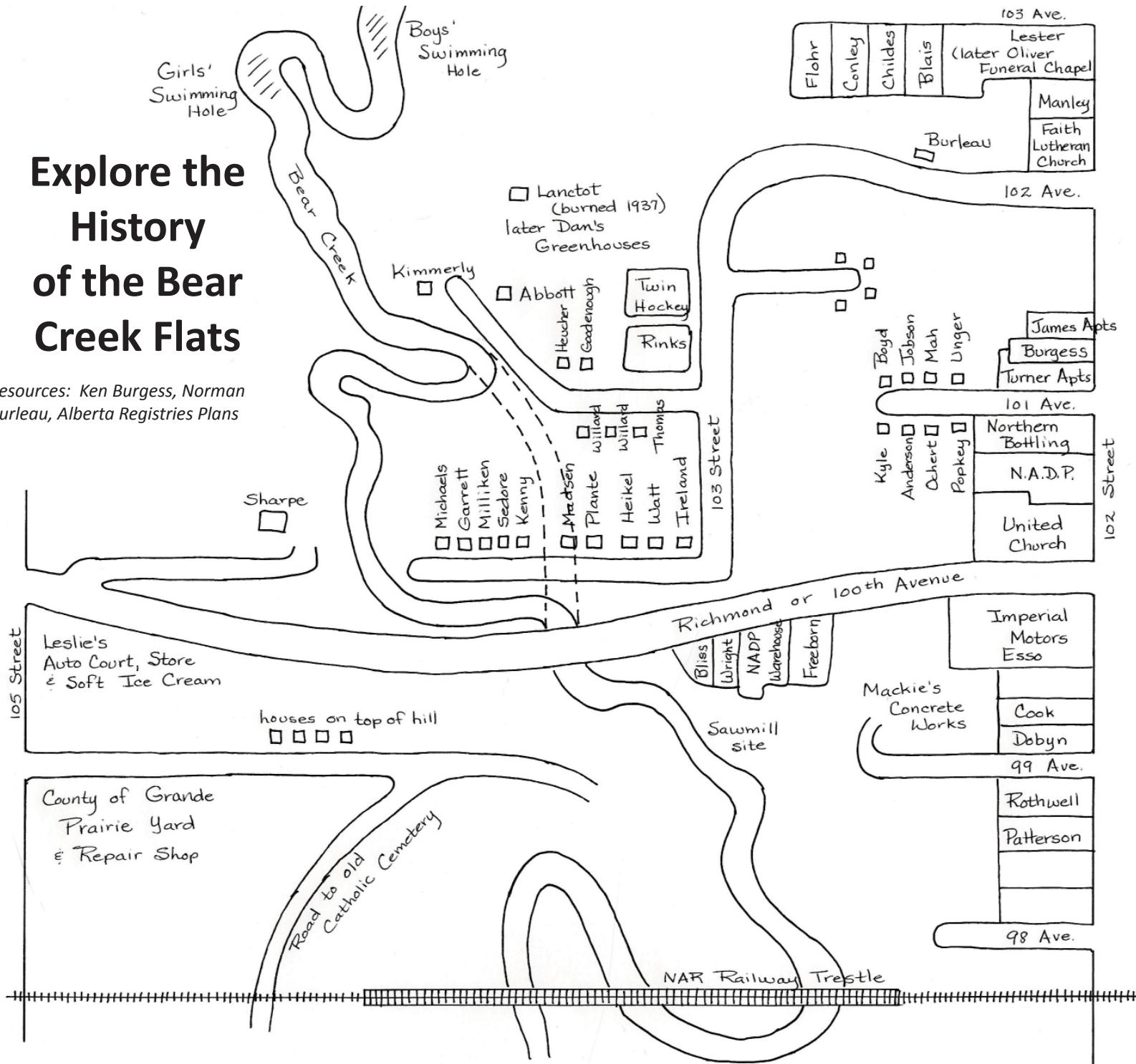
It is difficult, without corresponding plans of each section and serious study comparing house numbers with lot, block and plan numbers, to determine exactly where each family lived.

If there are mistakes on the following map, please draw in what you remember and send it to us at the archives.

Clockwise from top left: Grande Prairie in 1917 by Covert Photography, SPRA 2001.1.112; the Lanctot home in the valley ca. 1930, SPRA 252.01; the twin hockey arenas in the valley ca. 1955, Burgess family collection SPRA 2003.24.14; St. Vincent's Catholic Cemetery on the west bank ca. 1920, SPRA 252.03.; and Walker's Saw & Planing Mill on the creek in 1916, SPRA 252.07. These last two photographs are from the Dolly Lanctot Auger fonds.

# Explore the History of the Bear Creek Flats

Resources: Ken Burgess, Norman Burleau, Alberta Registries Plans



The following articles about **The Last Hold-Out** in the Bear Creek Flats were published in the Daily Herald Tribune. Beth Sheehan clipped the articles and kept them with the photo at right.

August 1, 1985

*The City continues to dig, pave and construct around Fred Abbott, who is persisting in his claim to maintain a residence in Centennial Park.*

*That little house you see to your right as you go west on Richmond Ave. over the bridge is where Abbott lives, and will continue to live, although he is rapidly being surrounded by \$10.7 million worth of park improvements.*

*Abbott is now 90, lost track of his only relative 35 years ago, and is in failing health. His friends in the museum across Bear Creek and city staff took him to the hospital several times last year. He lives in somewhat primitive conditions—sometimes getting his drinking water from the nearby creek.*

*The city wants him to move, and has bought houses in different locations, offering to trade him straight across—new dwelling for old. He doesn't want to leave and continues to grasp a note from a 1965 city*



Above, the last small home in the Flats at the time Muskoseepi Park was being constructed. From the Beth Sheehan fonds, SPRA 002.05.03.439.

council. He sold the city a piece of property in the creek valley and the note promises him the right to reside on the land for as long as he lives. The city says the promise holds no legal water but is not pushing the matter.

Abbott has apparently accepted the city's offer several times, only to reject them when the time comes to move. It's a waiting game to be sure but this appears to be one instance where City Hall, often maligned in a general sense, appears to be showing a degree of compassion.

October 3, 1985

*It looks like the case of Fred Abbott may be into its last chapter. The 90-year old Grande Prairie man, who lived in a ramshackle hut on the edge of Bear Creek in Centennial Park, has moved to Pioneer Lodge.*

*The city will likely bulldoze his former home to make way for further urban park construction, within the next few days.* (cont'd on page 12)

# Letter from a Soldier

In our September newsletter, we try to include something for Remembrance Day. This letter and accompanying photographs were contributed by Wanda Zenner. Her father, Willis Johnston, had enlisted in Grande Prairie and was fighting in Germany in 1943. Here he is writing to his sister Dorothy (Johnston) Doerkson who was living in Goodwin.

Wanda writes: "What I like about this letter is that it speaks of the army being very strong and he does not think the war would last much longer--which of course it did--much, much longer. Unfortunately the signature page of this letter has been lost over the years. I don't think the attached envelope is the correct one for the letter as the postmark is '44 and the letter was written in '43. I wanted to show how the envelopes were censored before being sent off!"

*cont'd from page 11*

Abbott still takes periodic walks down to the house, but it is now padlocked.

The city is helping a friend of Abbott's move out his personal articles and will store them as well.

It's a poignant case of a fellow with no known relatives holding on to a vague promise from a former city council that he could stay on the creek bank for as long as he lived.

Mayor Oscar Blais and city staff have made a genuine and lengthy effort to resolve the issue to Abbott's satisfaction—the city was even willing to trade him a new house straight up.

The issue was bound to come to a head sooner or later—and sooner is already past. The city needs to get the area landscaped.

No matter how you swing a case like this, the city will come up look like a villain, which really belies the effort that has gone into resolving it.

Dear Folks

Received your Christmas card and the two dollars. It came in real handy as we hadn't been paid for near a month. Have been very busy the last while. Put every day but one in on the road last month and sure put in a great many miles. What they will do with all this stuff they have is more than I know but I do hope I have better luck than the last time. After getting out of bed at four-thirty every day I want to have a little part in it some way.

Things sure have changed some and every thing seems to be well on its way to some kind of an end. Just what I don't know but hope it will be better than the last. Our army is very strong now and I can't see how Jerry can stand up to it for long. It's been a tough grind with the damp, mud and flu but I do think that the end is very near.

Hadn't had any mail for some time and when it did come in last night, I got my share. It did seem nice as one does think a lot of every one in the dull hours.

There sure isn't a great deal to write about as I haven't seen much of Jerry since I had my hand hurt. Just the same old thing, but I feel swell on it and have been very lucky as I haven't had the flu like most of the boys. I do hope it don't sweep Canada as it has the army here.

Well it's quite late so I must say "cheerio" and hope you are all...

last page lost



Wed 8-12-43

CANADIAN LEGION  
WAR SERVICES Inc.  
CANADIAN KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS  
WAR SERVICES  
  
ON ACTIVE SERVICE  
  
CANADIAN Y.M.C.A.  
OVERSEAS  
THE SALVATION ARMY  
CANADIAN WAR SERVICES

Wed  
8-12-43

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CFA 170(3693)

PLEASE WRITE ON BOTH SIDES



Right, Willis Johnston 1921 – 1995  
Regimental Number - M33937

Opposite, Willis' Medals from left to right:  
1939-45 Star, France and Germany Star, Defense  
Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with  
Clasp, War Medal 1939-45.

CANADIAN LEGION  
WAR SERVICES Inc.  
CANADIAN KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS  
WAR SERVICES  
  
ON ACTIVE SERVICE  
  
CANADIAN Y.M.C.A.  
OVERSEAS  
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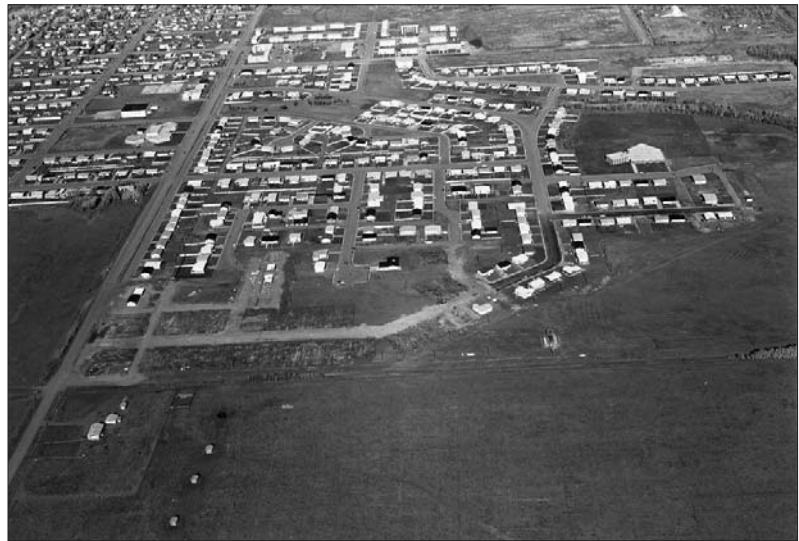
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CFA 170(3693)

PLEASE WRITE ON BOTH SIDES



# The Endless Variety of Panda Camera



The Panda Camera collection is not just about personal portraits. There are many community photographs showing events and people in Grande Prairie and area too! They include live theatre productions, parades, street scenes, aerials, events, church and school ceremonies, businesses, boards and committees, and just candid shots of what was happening around town.



Overpage from top left, an aerial of Grande Prairie ca. 1966 showing the new Swanavon and St. Gerard Schools (45.01); an unidentified barber and customer in 1970 (337.05); and a worker at the Northern Alberta Dairy Pool ca. 1966 (58.06). All of these photographs and many more can be seen by clicking on the Alberta InSight link on our webpage, [www.southpeacearchives.org](http://www.southpeacearchives.org) and typing "Panda Camera" into the search box. The uploaded photographs are just a sample--many more community photographs in this collection have some copyright restrictions but can be used with permission from the copyright holder.



This page from top left, the Bathtub Races in 1969 (1809.11); the Trumper Swan which floated on the reservoir in the 1970s (1870.01); spectators helping to fight a fire in the building above Panda Camera ca. 1970 (1776.02); and a German dance troupe from Pouce Coupe in a street display ca. 1970 (1867.03).

# What Archives Do and Why We Do It

by Leslie Pearson, B Sc, MAS

*Author's Note: Some of you may have visited our reading room in the last few months and been surprised to see a rather large appliance in one corner of our reading room. In the absence of any further questions from our readers, we thought this would be a good opportunity to explain a new preservation initiative we've embarked on.*

So what's up with the fridge sitting in the middle of the Reading Room? Actually, it's not a fridge, it's a freezer and, contrary to the comments of one of our volunteers, it's not for keeping drinks cold, but is actually the new home of our negative collection! Thanks to a grant from the National Archival Development Program, administered by Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and delivered by the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA), we were able to purchase a freezer and supplies to place SPRA's collection of photographic negatives into cold (frozen) storage.

One of the key aims of archives is to preserve the material in our care for as long as possible. With

paper, this is fairly straight-forward. However, archives also hold material on slightly trickier mediums, such as film, including still photographic images and moving images. Most of our holdings on film are on either a cellulose nitrate or cellulose acetate film base. The problem with film is that over time it deteriorates in an irreversible,

and, toward the later stages, pretty nasty, way. The chemical reaction that causes this deterioration speeds up with high temperature and high humidity and is "autocatalyzed", which means that it goes faster and faster as time goes on because it is feeding its own reaction. Acid is released, creating a vinegar smell for acetate film and eating away metals stored in the vicinity for nitrate film. The acids released are also bad for the health of the people working with them. There are various other symptoms and consequences of deterioration including image fading, softened and sticky emulsions, film becoming brittle and shrinking, image channelling and bubbling, bubbling of the film itself, and plasticizers added to the film oozing out and crystallizing on the surface. Finally, the film just disintegrates into a fine dust. Not pleasant.

These deterioration reactions can't be reversed and can destroy film in a relatively short period of time, so the best way to preserve the images is to prevent the reactions from getting started by placing the film in the best storage possible. Or if the film is already in the early stages of decay, by moving it to the best possible storage, we can slow down, almost to a halt, the deterioration reaction and prevent further damage. Colour negatives have even more problems, because the dyes used in their creation are subject to fading, even if the images are kept in complete darkness! Fortunately, cold storage helps with this too. If we stored our negatives at average room temperature and humidity, they would likely last no more than 100 years. With cold storage, the lifespan is predicted to increase exponentially to the almost unimaginable 1000-year range!

A good number of our readers are likely aware that the Panda Camera Studio collection was donated to the Archives by Paul Pivert at the beginning of 2011. This fantastic resource on the history of the community of Grande Prairie and area contained



The freezer in the reading room.

hundreds of thousands of images, both in colour and black and white, and on film and prints. We were already aware of the benefits of cold storage, but until we were ready to deal with the Panda Camera funds, we didn't feel we had enough holdings on film to make it feasible.

Thus began our journey into the world of archival cold storage. Our first step was to label each individual negative with an identification number allowing us to track them physically and in our database so we'll be able to find them again. We also scanned about 8000 images to ensure that we can provide access to the images even though they are in the freezer. Since any time out of cold storage reduces the lifespan of the negatives and the effectiveness of the method, we want to keep retrievals to a minimum.

Because humidity has such a great effect on negatives, we can't just put negatives into the freezer without protecting them from the high humidity and humidity fluctuations that normally occur within a freezer. We knew of the existence of a method called the "Critical Moisture Indicator" method and that it had been successfully used by smaller archives, so we decided to try it. The method involves several layers of polyethylene bags (an inert plastic that won't cause further deterioration of our negatives), humidity indicator strips, and a moisture absorbing material.

First we put the negatives in plastic sleeves. We then gathered the sleeves in packages of about 70 sheets each. The resulting packages were 1-1½ inches thick. We spent a lot of time labeling and recording locations (we do want to be able to find these things again!). Each group of negative sleeves was placed in a heavy-weight, resealable bag.



Stacks of negatives and supplies

Then we sandwiched each of these packages between two sheets of matboard, which was the moisture absorbent we decided to use. Matboard is the same material used in framing to keep the photograph from touching the glass. We used a very high-quality, thick, acid-free matboard. Before we could use it, though, it had to be cut to the right size for the packages and dried in the oven to remove all of the moisture from it. (We had one volunteer notice us by the oven and ask us what we were cooking. He seemed very disappointed to find out it was only matboard and not something more appetizing!) The matboard/negative sandwich had a label attached with a humidity indicator card, and was then placed in another resealable bag. The humidity indicator cards change colour from blue to pink if the humidity increases.

Once we had several packages ready, we placed them into an ordinary cardboard box. Because the negatives were already encased in three layers of plastic (the sleeve and two bags), we didn't need to go to the extra expense of purchasing archival-quality, acid-free boxes. We chose fairly small boxes so they would be easier to handle. We also wanted the negative packages to fit inside them relatively snugly without a lot of wasted space.

Each box was labeled and had its own humidity indicator card attached. Then the boxes were each sandwiched between two more pieces of dried matboard and placed in a third, much larger, resealable bag. Then the boxes were put in the freezer. 17

We'll check the packages in the freezer once a month to ensure that the humidity is still at an acceptably low level. One of the advantages of the procedure we used is that the packages are resealable and the matboard can be redried when the humidity level inside the package gets too high. It is estimated that the packages should have a life-span of approximately 19 years before we need to redry the matboard.

We are using just an ordinary, upright freezer. A chest-style freezer works too, but we thought an upright would fit better in our space and be easier to monitor and retrieve things from (I, for one, have no desire to upend myself in a deep-freeze searching for a negative in the bottom box!).



*Boxes in the freezer.*

The next phase of our project will be to place our motion-picture film in the freezer as well. However, because of the decrease in accessibility once the film is in the freezer, we're waiting on this until we can get more of our motion-picture film transferred to digital format.

Hopefully you haven't found this column too technical this month. For those of you who skipped to the end of the column hoping for a summary without all the technical bits, here it is: we have a freezer in our reading room to store our negatives because they are happiest when they are frozen. So if you see it and try to open it, expecting cold drinks

or baked goods, you'll be sorely disappointed, first because it is locked to circumvent just such curiosity and second because the only baking it contains is the matboard, which, as I said earlier, is not that appetizing. And for those of you out there who are experimental types, you'll be happy to know that this method can be enacted in your own home as well, with your negatives! Actually, if you are interested in trying this method for yourself, we'd be happy to help point you in the right direction and get you started.



*The above advertisement for the Grande Prairie Drug Store appeared in the June 8, 1915 Grande Prairie Herald. It is interesting to note the variety of products this drug store carried: pure drugs for humans and animals, candies, toiletries, tobacco products, and is that sporting goods? And don't forget the lending library!*

## New at the Archives

### Thank You Donors!

The collections at SPRA have all been donated by individuals, organizations, and municipal governments. You are our only resource for the preservation of the history of the south Peace.

Marion Hill Photograph Albums  
Marion Hill

Seed Cleaning Plant Correspondence  
Bob Cochrane

Mel Rodacker's Old Timers Photograph  
Louise Hanham

DeBolt Beautification Society  
DeBolt Agricultural Society records  
Fran Moore

Rycroft Train Registers  
Pat Wearmouth

Peace Country Sports Therapy Assn. records  
Lisa Schaffrick

Photograph of Isabel Campbell & Grant McEwan  
Pat Olson

1928 map of Grande Prairie Municipal District  
Walter Paszkowski

Delaney-Boyer cookbook  
Mel Delaney

1928 map of Grande Prairie and Peace River Dist.  
Paulette Hrychiw

Reference Library book, Foulest of Murders  
Doris Tansem

### New Release!

#### Foulest of Murders

written by Wallace Tansem,  
edited by Doris Tansem and Brenda LaCroix

is now available for \$20.00 from  
Brenda LaCroix 780-532-1667  
[croix5@gmail.com](mailto:croix5@gmail.com)  
or phone Doris at 780-513-1913

### Are You Enjoying This Newsletter?

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

### Submissions to this Newsletter

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

### Benefits of Membership

- Be actively involved in preserving the history of this area.
- Have a voice in keeping archival collections in the Peace River Country.
- Become more aware of the issues and types of collections in archives.
- Receive a quarterly newsletter and notice of meetings & events.

## **South Peace Regional Archives Society Membership/Renewal Form**

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are two types of membership:

Full membership--get involved in the society, attend meetings, vote on issues and run for office.

Associate membership--receive communications (like this newsletter) to stay informed about issues and happenings at the Archives.

This membership is \_\_\_\_\_ new \_\_\_\_\_ renewal

Full Membership  
\$20.00/person or \$30.00/couple \_\_\_\_\_

Associate Member  
\$15.00/person \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to donate to the  
South Peace Regional Archives \_\_\_\_\_

Total Membership and Donation \_\_\_\_\_

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

## **Society and Member News**

**Watch for a new feature**  
in our newsletter--"clippings" from  
The Grande Prairie Herald  
which will be 100 years old in 2013.  
(see sample on page 18)  
These are submitted by volunteer  
Kathryn Auger who is thoroughly enjoying  
reading the papers on-line.  
Thanks Kathryn!

**You Are Invited**  
to  
**"The Creative Process"**  
**South Peace Regional Archive's**  
**2012 Film & Story Tea**

Join us for an afternoon of memories  
about arts and culture in the South  
Peace, featuring a variety of speakers,  
photographs, and film.

**Sunday, October 14, 2012 at the**  
**Grande Prairie Golden Age Centre**  
**(10222-101 Avenue)**

Doors open 1:45 pm  
Program begins 2:00 pm  
Refreshments to follow

*Special thanks to **New Horizon Co-op** for  
sponsoring this event.*

