

The Central Alberta Historical Society Newsletter



Fall 2007

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Twelfth Annual Pioneer Days at Sunnybrook Farm August 18 and 19

Sunnybrook Farm Museum instituted a Golden Furrow Award in 2005. Each year, early families who farmed in the Red Deer Area and helped build rural communities, are chosen for this award. The James Bower family, settlers from Ontario was selected as the first award recipients. In 2006 the Hermary



Dorothy, daughter-in-law of Herve and Ruth, accepted the Golden Furrow award on behalf of the many Johnsons in attendance

Family from Quebec was selected and during Pioneer Days at the Farm this August the Herve Johnson family was honoured with the Golden Furrow Award. Both Herve and his wife, Ruth immigrated to the Red Deer area from the States a century ago. Many of their descendants still live on farms in the rural area south and east of the city. Ruth's father, Frank Vanslyke designed and produced in his blacksmith shop the Vanslyke plow. This plow was popular for use on Central Alberta farms.

More than 1000 visited Sunnybrook farm for their Pioneer Days weekend, their largest attendance to date. Saturday morning began with a farmer style breakfast at 8:00 AM. A new demonstration this year was provided by Phyllis and Robby Fyn. This couple from Linden brought two of their oxen to the farm and showed how these big gentle cattle were used to provide power for early farming. The oxen were stabled in an open shed and were a very popular stop for visitors along with the regular goats, chickens, sheep and pig that draw children to the farm all summer. Some youngsters like to sit on the seats of the antique tractors, grasp the steering wheel and in their imagination drive across farm fields, but live animals have an appeal for all.

Volunteers work at Sunnybrook Farm throughout the year. Much of the farm machinery and buildings restoration is done during the late fall and winter. Spring brings field trips of school classes to learn how simple machines work as well as the details of early farm work.

Throughout the summer, day camps are held for children as well as regular Friday teas. The gate is open daily for visitors to come and browse through the buildings and open sheds of stored farm artifacts. During Pioneer Days many skills and homestead activities were demonstrated and made on the farm ice cream and pie topped off the day for the visitors.

News and Events

CAHS Board News

August 22 Board Meeting brought forward the information that CAHS has received charitable status and now qualifies to issue official charitable receipts. Our membership in Red Deer Cultural Charter Partners was renewed and Marion Hives will represent our society there. Secretary Lu Piening attended a Calgary website training and will post CAHS information on the www.albertahistory.org site. Currently information about our published books and our board membership is available on this site.

North Red Deer history activist, Harlan Hulleman, spoke to the meeting about his proposal for a mural on the old and never used concrete abutment that was built for the Alberta Central Railway. Like a man made erratic rock, this cement structure is beside Taylor Drive where the rail bed of the CPR railway track that did get built and used, ran. The board agreed to support this project in principle and will be represented on a committee to achieve the mural.

September 20, a brief board meeting was held, following the AGM to authorize grant applications in preparation for the third Historic Red Deer Week, next May.

CAHS Annual General Meeting and Fall Tour to Pleasant Valley

On Thursday morning of September 20th in front of the museum, Shirley Dye checked off the names of 28 people who were lucky enough to make the list for a tour and luncheon as guests of the Pleasant Valley of Hutterite Colony. A mid day dinner would better describe the meal we were given as we joined the men of this 130 souls community for their noon meal. Their grain harvesting was in progress and during such a busy season 28 people was the limit set for our group.

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Pleasant Valley

The bus drive took us east of the city and through the blended colours of fall in the river valley, passed the steaming Joffre gas installations and on out to Haynes. There we turned north for a few miles and a short distance west to reach the land once owned by the Walters family. The Walters were prosperous early farmers in the area. Their grand three story house was moved east of Haynes and was visible from the bus. Huge Russian poplars planted by the earlier settlers are all that remain to mark the Walters home on the present colony site of four thousand acres.

We were met by the daughter of the Colony Head. Her uncle is minister, and her mother is in charge of the kitchen and meals. Before the meal we were shown through their food processing facility. Poultry, beef and pork are processed and stored in huge freezers on site. Here too, vegetables are canned in gallon jars. The large stainless steel vats and tables of this plant were manufactured by colony tradesmen.

The noon meal had the delicious savor of food grown, prepared and served on site. Each item from salad through to dessert was served in dishes with enough food for four. A prayer of thanks was offered both before and after the meal by the oldest working man, there. Following the meal, the young women present sang two hymns with German lyrics and one in English. Each was sung in harmony with a very devout message of dirge-like tone quality. The school teacher, an assistant and the school children joined us from the adjoining eating room to entertain with their original version of, *This land is your land*. Their lyric described their Pleasant Valley Colony and their pride in being part of it.

Children spend their first three years cared for by their mothers, and when their mothers are part of work crews, older women and girls younger than 16, care for them in their homes. After the communal breakfast at 7:00, children from three to six attend kindergarten where they speak only German. School age children six to fifteen attend school taught in English by an Alberta accredited teacher.

Before and after the English portion of their school day students are taught religious studies and to be literate in German. At the end of the school and work day, parents take their children home and the adults attend a before supper church service.

At sixteen boys spend a year working with the men in charge of the various male occupations of the colony: grain operations, and gardening, livestock such as dairy, pigs, and poultry, trades of machining and sheet metal, mechanics, and furniture making. At seventeen boys chose their occupation and begin their apprenticeship under the man in

charge. Girls go directly to women's work. Their working years are spent in the seasonal round of work: sewing, gardening, berry picking and cleaning not only their own homes but the church, school, and outbuildings and taking their turn on the cooking roster.

During slack work times in summer the young men visit other colonies to find a wife to bring back to their home colony. The size of each colony is limited to 150. The Pleasant Valley group is currently building a hog operation site in the Bashaw area. When the new homes and building are ready lots will be drawn to select those who will leave the old colony for the new one. Wives and their children go with the husbands.

The CAHS guests were divided into three groups for the after dinner tours. Interpreters proudly showed us the colony operations that make up this remarkably self sufficient community. Outside information is limited to two farm papers and two local newspapers, one copy of each for the whole community. The teacher Trish Levann, is proud of the library of books that she has been able to assemble during her four years of teaching there. While radios and televisions are not allowed, computers are used in the dairy barn to record the milk production records of each cow. The farming facilities and machinery are up-to-date in size and technology. The first European settlers on this fertile land came as individual families or single men to farm as a means to prosperity. They were forced to live in simple isolated homes and meet many of their own subsistence needs. Like pioneer farmers Hutterite colonists of today meet many of their own subsistence needs. But they chose to live in large collectives within old hierarchal dictates. Their chosen model is the Christian community as recorded in the Gospel of Acts in the bible.

Due to the gracious hospitality of the hosts and the charm of their unhurried pace, tour members dallied beyond our scheduled departure time and we arrived back in Red Deer barely in time for the 3:00 AGM

Central Alberta Historical Society 2007 Annual General Meeting

President, Don Hepburn chaired the meeting and his report that follows is a succinct summary of the activities of our society during the past year.

The year 2006-2007 was another busy and successful year for our Society. As has become our practice over the twelve years since our founding, we have:

- maintained a program of monthly free public meetings presenting interesting speakers about matters of historical interest;

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AGM

- maintained an active publications program, publishing works by central Alberta authors or works about Alberta and Western history;
- sponsored a four-day bus tour to sites of historical interest and importance;
- played a significant role in the regional Historical Fair
- organized and sponsored Historic Red Deer Week a week-long festival at the end of May involving many community organizations;
- continued to work toward the completion of our Historic Arches Park, a major contribution to the public presentation of our history in the downtown area
- and continued to work in cooperation with other Red Deer and district organizations to record and to raise awareness of our history and heritage.

As the chapter of the Historical Society of Alberta serving the central part of the province, the area extending from border to border east and west and roughly between Olds and Wetaskiwin, it is important that our Board of Directors should represent the area, and not just the city of Red Deer. To this end, our board of fourteen directors includes members from Stettler, Rocky Mountain House, Sylvan Lake, Innisfail and Lacombe as well as the city of Red Deer. Also, our Chapter is well-represented on the Provincial Council, the governing body of our parent organization, the Historical Society of Alberta. In the coming year three members of our Board will be members of the Provincial Council: our President will be the Chapter representative, Dr. Bill Baergen will be First Vice President, and Carolyn Kent will be a Director at Large.

The Board of Directors is charged with the responsibility of conducting the business of the Society throughout the year. I want to thank all of the Directors for their commitment of time and energy, enabling the Society to function and flourish. I think special thanks are in order for several of the Directors: to Janet Walter and Shirley Dye who, between them, have put out our Newsletter, to Dr. Lu Piening for his faithful work as Secretary; and to Faye Hughes for her work promoting membership and maintaining contact with members.

Membership has dropped slightly over the year, as it has in other Chapters. Some have suggested that this may be partly because one can attend our monthly meetings whether one is a member or not, so there is little incentive for joining. I think it is important to remember however, that our funding is very much tied to membership. First of all, most of the annual membership fee paid to the Historical Society of Alberta is returned to the Chapter to help support Chapter activities. Besides that, our Chapter's share of the funding provided to H.S.A. by the Alberta

Historical Resources Foundation is determined by our membership. Larger chapters receive a larger share of the money. This year approximately \$20,000 will be distributed amongst the four chapters. As our membership shrinks, so does our share of the AHRF grant. At one point our membership exceeded 100. It would be very helpful to the Chapter if it could be maintained at least at that level. Perhaps it would be appropriate here also to mention that since our chapter has approved charitable status for tax purposes, people who wish to contribute to the Society to assist in our work on one project or another can be duly receipted for tax purposes.

A major part of our program is our series of monthly programs open to the public, featuring speakers on a variety of topics, under the capable and imaginative direction of Shirley Dye. I want to take this opportunity to express our thanks to her for all her hard work. The meetings attract audiences of 50 to 60 people on average. The September meeting is our annual general meeting, and is usually followed by a bus tour and dinner. This year we visited the Experimental Farm at Lacombe, now approaching its one hundredth year of operation, for an excellent meal and a very informative talk by Howard Fredeen. The December meeting was also a dinner meeting. This year the theme was a country school Christmas concert. Grade six student Billy Baergen told us about his project researching one-room schools. During the role call at the beginning of the meeting, it was surprising to learn the number of people who had attended one-room schools themselves. We took the occasion to award our annual volunteer service medalion to Pat MacDonald from Rocky Mountain House, a member of our Board and a tireless worker for history and heritage.

The Publications Committee was pleased to launch during the past year the book *What Lies Behind the Picture? A Personal Journey into Cree Ancestry* by Vern Wishart. Launches were held in Edmonton where the author resides, in Red Deer where his great grandparents were early settlers, and in Rosebud, where they subsequently moved to be the first homesteaders in the district. We were unduly cautious in our sales predictions, and by Christmas found that we had to order a second printing. The Committee also has in progress a new edition of *The Markerville Story*, by Carl Morkeberg. Originally published as a series of weekly columns in the *Innisfail Province*, these reminiscences about the early days amongst the Icelanders, Danes and their neighbours north and west of Innisfail were published in book form thirty years ago. That book has been long out of print. Now, as part of their centennial celebrations, the local museum community has asked our Publications Committee to publish a new edition, and preparation of the manuscript is well under way.

The Committee has spent much time over the past year developing terms of reference to guide its future operations, and these have now been completed, thanks to the persistence and hard work of Committee chair Bill Baergen. Just in time, too, as we have received several manuscripts for our consideration. I want to express my deep appreciation to Dr. Baergen for his leadership and his commitment to our publication endeavours.

Historic Red Deer Week (the fifth incarnation of the festival) was a success this year, with better attendance and broader scope than in previous years. In fact, it has grown each year. Originally held in the first week of May, this year it was moved to the end of that month, partly in hopes of finding more favourable weather. (We have been known to have blizzards in the first part of the month.) By the end of May, many historic sites in the surrounding area are open for the season and can become connected to Historic Red Deer Week, which probably needs to be renamed Historic Red Deer District Week or perhaps something a little catchier. We have benefited greatly for the past three years from the imagination, energy and hard work of project coordinator Sheryl Krill, but she will not be continuing. Therefore we are looking for a new coordinator, someone who can take charge of the project, and devote major time and attention to it for about five months. We are busy preparing grant applications to find funding to support the position. We are also looking for a new committee chair, the present one having indicated that he will be not be continuing.

The Regional Historical Heritage School Fair served as the anchor point for the first four years of Historic Red Deer Week, but this year it was separated from it by a few weeks, the Historical Fair being near the beginning of May and Historic Red Deer Week at the end of the month. Our Chapter is heavily involved with the fair.

We sponsor the fair, and the proceeds of our casino go largely to the support of the fair. Also Board member Rod Trentham plays a major role in organizing the event, and many of our Chapter members serve as judges. It is important to maintain a connection between the Fair and Historic Red Deer Week, even though they may be separated in time.

Our **Historic Arches Park** project continues to move forward. It has been in the planning stages for at least the last six or seven years. Local artist and muralist David More has designed a series of historic arches that are reminiscent of the railroad roundhouse that once stood on the edge of downtown Red Deer, reflecting Red Deer's railway past. Themes from Red Deer's history are to be etched or engraved on panels mounted on the pillars of the eight arches, portraying Red Deer's history since the days before settlement. It is an exciting project and will make an impor-

Because of increasing costs in the construction industry, some revisions have had to be made in the design, but it now appears that the project can be completed with the funds available for it. There can be some flexibility in timing. The pilings for bases of the columns need to be placed before winter, but much of the other work can be done when there is less pressure on the construction industry.

Our June bus tour – the Buffaloes to Buckeroos Tour – was a great success this year. After a morning stop at the Glenbow Museum for a tour of the new Mavericks exhibit, we made a stop at the brand new Siksika Interpretive Centre near Chumy and then went on to Lethbridge where we stayed for three nights at the Heidelberg Inn. We made trips from there out to such sites as Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump, the Bar U Ranch, the Kootenai Brown Museum in Pincher Creek, Writing on Stone Park, and the McIntyre Ranch. This was our twelfth annual tour. They have all been successful, and have generated upwards of \$15,000 for the Chapter's treasury. However we are in need of a new organizer/director and it is not clear at this point who might fill that position.

Overall it has been a busy year. The past two years have been not only busy, but interesting and fulfilling for me as president of the Society. As I step down from that position, I want to once again express my thanks to the Board of Directors for their support and hard work, and my best wishes to the incoming Board for continued success in carrying out the objectives of the Society.

As one of those who initiated our historical chapter, Don Hepburn has acted as vice-president or president for the last twelve years. Those of us who have worked with him have experienced a rare leadership of accepting and encouraging the efforts of others and his ability to be effective and thorough in all his own public contributions. We are thankful that his wisdom will be available to CAHS while he continues as Past President.

2007-2008 CAHS Board of Directors

President: Janet Walter, Vice-President Bill Mackay, Past President Don Hepburn, Secretary Lu Piening, Treasurer Marion Hives, Membership Faye Hughes, Program Director Shirley Dye, Newsletter Editor Pat Macdonald, Directors: Bill Baergen, Bob Lampard, Rod Trentham, Marguerite Watson, Carolyn Kent, and John Tobias.

Jim Martins resigned from the board as he has a new position in B.C. John Tobias who was instrumental in beginning CAHS and helped edit the first book published by our Publications Committee has now joined our board.