

Central Alberta Historical Society Annual General Meeting



Pioneer Lodge 4324 - 46A Ave

September 17 AGM: 5:30 Supper: 6:30

Guest Speaker: Kathleen Raines - Women's Roll in the Harvest

Tickets available @ Red Deer Museum
Members \$25, Non-members \$27:50



Be sure to bring your ticket to win harvest door prizes

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Newsletter: Editor and layout Shirley Dye
sadd@shaw.ca

Contacts:

Central Alberta Historical Society

4525—47A Ave

Red Deer AB

T4N 6Z6

Fax: 403-342-6644 ATTN: CAHS

Email: bmackay@telusplanet.net

President: 403-227-3563

Membership: 403-343-1881

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President's Message

By Bill Mackay

Fall is coming quickly and winter will be hard on its heels. Let's hope that the fall is long and that the winter is shorter than the last one.

The good news is that we have a full slate of programs lined up for the coming year and ALL OF THEM will be held at the MAG on the THIRD WEDNESDAY of the month beginning at 7 P.M. That is except September which is to be held at the Pioneer's Lodge in September (see elsewhere in this newsletter for details) and the December Christmas celebration which will be held in the Golden Circle on December 17.

I look forward to seeing a good turnout at the September meeting. Shirley and Faye have organized a great unique meal and an interesting evening. We promise to keep the Annual General Meeting short.

A look back A way back!

Dutch navigator Henry Hudson, in the employ of the English, entered the inland sea now known as Hudson Bay, but thinks he has found the Pacific Ocean. The year? 1610!

British Columbia legislature votes to secede from Canada, giving impetus to the financing of the CPR and Imperial loan guarantees. The year? 1878!

Queen Victoria was proclaimed Queen of Canada. The year? 1837!

Emergencies Rough In Pioneer Days

A broken leg or an infected appendix in those days of no roads was often more than a patient could bear. There was no such thing as a comfortable ambulance and a couple of experienced first aid men to take care of you and whisk you to a hospital at sixty miles an hour.

The best transportation you could hope for was a democrat, in the winter a sleigh. An open sleigh on a cold day with the wind blowing was not the most comfortable place to be, but that was all there was.

In 1910 John Isbister was trapping muskrats south of the Innisfail golf course hill or in the vicinity of Napoleon Lake when he came upon the body of a man. The body was submerged in a slough. The rest of the story is just as tragic. He had a wife, north of Spruce View in advanced state of pregnancy. The man went out to work in a saw mill and earned the sum of thirty-five dollars. On the way home he stopped in Innisfail and bought one hundred pounds of flour and twenty pounds of sugar. This left him with thirty dollars. It was his intention to stay at home with his wife until after the baby was born. He never got there. Apparently someone took his life for the small amount cash, the flour and sugar plus the horse and saddle as well.

It was about the same time Charlie Monteith and his wife were out breaking a patch of land with a walking plow. Mrs. Monteith was holding the handles and Charlie was driving the horses. The plow hit an obstruction, more than likely a root and went sideways, hitting Mrs Monteith on the thigh causing a compound fracture.

Now a compound fracture of the thigh is a tragic under any circumstance, but under the primitive condition prevailing at the time, nonexistent roads and lack of transportation it is well-nigh tragic. Charlie went to the nearest neighbour, Mrs. Sveinbjornson for help. Mrs Sveinbjornson was a graduate midwife and a bonesetter (I guess they call them orthopedic surgeons now) and on top of that even though she could hardly speak or understand a word of English she was blessed with lots of natural savvy. All the equipment she had was a bottle of morphine tablets that Dr. Richard Parsons of Red Deer had given her, a bottle of Lysol for disinfectant, some bed sheets to hold the splint in place and wire stretcher to stretch the leg so the bone could be set.

Mrs. Monteith came along like a house on fire. In six months she got along with one cane and later died at age 84.

There was the case of Harry Anderson who lived on Yankee Flats. He was going for a load of hay and took his shot gun in case he saw something to shoot. He loaded the gun and put it on top of the load. Forgetting that the gun was loaded and cocked, the action of pulling the gun through the hay pulled the trigger, the gun discharged and blew his fingers off. His brother was dispatched to Markerville (the closest phone) to summon the doctor. His brother Frank, who operated a livery stable in Innisfail brought Dr. Membray out the fifteen miles in forty-five minutes. Harry's hand healed up in good shape and was not long before he was able to handle a six or eight horse team with the best of them.

Ole Johnson and his wife Bodelia, who came from Norway, took a place one mile north of Markerville in 1902. Mrs. Johnson died of cancer one month after her eighth baby was born. In 1908 daughter Millie was stricken with acute appendicitis and Dr. Parsons was called from Red Deer. A ruptured appendix was almost always fatal in those days. Mrs. Peter Thompson was called and she and Dr. Parsons operated on the kitchen table. Millie was soon up and about leading a normal life.

The above story is a heavy edited version of a chapter in "Settlement Tales Of West Central Alberta" written by Carl Morkeberg and republished by Central Alberta Historical Society. If you want to read the complete version of this story with all the details and all of Carl's other stories in the book, you may purchase a copy from the CAHS or Historic Markerville Creamery Museum.

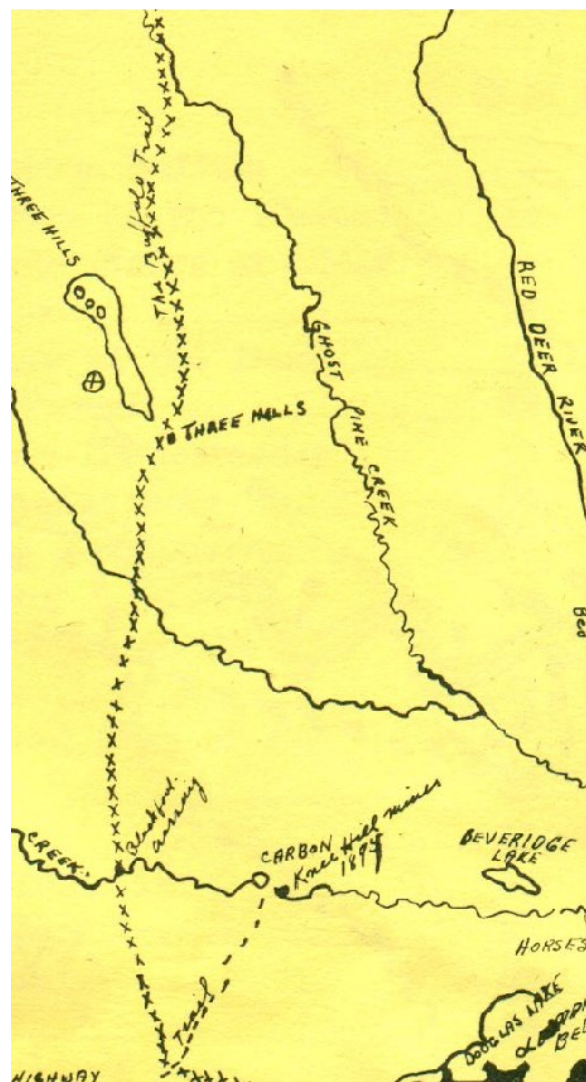
The Early Days of Three Hills and Area

“There was nothing here...” so reported early adventurers. Only open prairie with no escape from the savage weather, no water, no firewood, no shelter. And summer brought fierce storms, the always-present risk of terrible grass fires, and the troublesome mosquitos to plague the ‘green horns’. The creeks such as the Three Hills Creek when high could be nearly impossible to ford: supply wagons could be lost crossing their abrupt banks. Travellers needed guides to the crossings such as the Blackfoot crossing on the Kneehill, the fords on 36-30-23, and the crossing on the Three Hills creek near the buffalo jump at the present-day Rural School site. One had to find the places that bot-tomed-out into smooth rock shallows for creeks could be turbulent even though the nearby Red Deer River was considered ‘mostly too much work’ for paddling.

Nothing?? This was a place that the indomitable Blackfoot commanded. Until Peter Pond (1778) pushed beyond the Saskatchewan-Churchill rivers into the distant ‘Athabaska Country’, few Europeans came to this vast open prairie with its distant horizons. Feeding the Red Deer River, the creeks the Ghost Pine (or Devil’s Pine as named by First People), the Three Hills, the Kneehill, the Rosebud river and the Serviceberry) were way-finders for first people. As were the hills, including the distinctive Three Hills. The cluster of bench-like geologic formations, drumlins left by the ice age, were named by First People for their similarity to knees, thus, the Kneehills. The surrounding area with its cutbanks, creeks and spotting hills was prized as a buffalo-hunting area.

Circling from the top of Signal Hill of the three hills, one can realize how First People surveyed the environs to distant horizons including the Sarcee Butte, the Hand Hills, Porter’s Butte, the Rockyford Rise, the Swalwell rise, the Kneehills and Rocky Mountains beyond, the distant hills towards Red Deer and Delburne, Trochu and across the Red Deer River to Rowley.

Not much of a map was needed even today: as the old-timers did, one can use the fingers of the right hand, each a creek feeding the Red Deer. Only a century ago, creeks were lined with willow, backed with nearby banks of poplar and pine, and bordered by marshes filled with water-fowl and game. The Three Hills Creek was known to the First People as the Creek of Many Swans. And always on these bare, open plains, there were the distinctive way-finding hills. The hills were places to lay out one’s deceased people or send smoke signals, to survey the land for hunting or visitors, to meet, and most recently, to toboggan and still, to view the land to the next horizon.



The Rosebud Trail, 1963, John J. Martin

The oxcart trail and the trail of the people followed the migration trail of the buffalo past the three hills and on towards Buffalo Lake

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Three Hills

While camping with Blackfoot in 1793, Hudson Bay Company surveyor Peter Fidler noted **coal** outcrops on the Kneehill Creek (at present-day Carbon), a discovery that soon fueled the competition between the Montreal-based Nor' Westers and the English-based Hudson Bay Company. This was prime buffalo hunting land. Little did he know his 'find' represented a vast extent of coalfields stretching from the Horseshoe Canyon formation near Drumheller to Edmonton, underlying our very feet here in present-day town of Three Hills. The discovery of coal spurred the building of the Grand Trunk Railroad, with its iron trail following on the migratory trail of the buffalo, placing mine shafts directly under the railroad and the growing Village of Three Hills.

Peter Fidler had surveyed more than 8000 miles of rivers and lakes in the present-day prairie provinces, also long-known way-finders for the first people as were the trails of buffalo. (See his early map, showing the Ghost Pine, Three Hills, Kneehill Creek and Rosebud River, which begs the question, "what is this place, Netuckis?") With the aggressive push of the competing railroads and the annihilating buffalo hunts--the last major one on the Prairies at Dry Island Buffalo Jump Park--as well as the introduction of white man's diseases, in particular, small pox, and the establishment of reserves, the place of the three hills lost its First People with their nomadic way of life.

In 1858 while looking for the reputed coal finds, John Palliser and his expert party visually sited coal burning in the creek banks 'on fire for as long as the natives could remember.' James Hector noted the rich, thick nutrient-rich grass in the valleys of the many creeks, vast grass ranges that could be burned out at a moment's notice, often started by native signal fires from the hilltops such as the easterly Signal Hill of the three hills. Whereas the promise of fortunes to be made by coal mining drove eastern and American investment westward (including to Kneehill County), the newly formed Dominion Government advertised for settlers. Germans from Russia, British, Eastern European, French and Finns responded.



Before the coming of fences, grassland was available and inexpensive along the drainage system to the Red Deer River.

In an effort to bring commerce the early territorial government installed bridges—one was placed at a long-known watering hole on the flat flood plain of the Three Hills creek. (open even in -40 weather, fed by warm artesian water coming from the coal seams along the bank) The bridge brought travelers and an economic opportunity for a lodging place, a small store, and livery stable—the early beginnings of the settlement to be known as Three Hills on the Flat. Coal, dug from the nearby banks and coulees, could be used as bartering means for store supplies from distant Didsbury, a two-day trip by horse and wagon--one-way. Within a few years with the support of government funding, creameries / cheese factories were built along the creeks, including Pratt Creamery on the growing settlement on the Flat. For convenience, in 1906, Henry Evans had permission from the Federal Government to relocate the site for the Three Hills Post Office from his squat to the settlement on the Flat. Unable to move the original building, he vacated his low-slung ranch house that he had used as the first Three Hills post office. It was a long low structure built with short walls (somehow only 4' lengths instead of 8') into a dirt bank that didn't lend itself to moving. A post office at the Flat required a new building. At the settlement with the help of some funding, he soon had a compact shack to serve as post office to the Flat that, in turn, was moved in 1911 to the new village location, the present day Town of Three Hills, where it was used as a residence.

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Two-story spruce log house belonging to early rancher-homesteaders, Cutler and Present, along the Three Hills Creek, built from nearby stands of spruce.

Three Hills

From 1889 on, with the coming of the CPR to Western Canada, the Burns cattle camps scattered across this area's rich grassland (from the Reed Ranch to Acme and east to the River), giving employment to early settlers who ranged cattle and cut hay. Meat was needed to feed the railway crews pushing the lines through to the Pacific. While trailing cattle down to the Red Deer River, William Cutler located many dinosaur finds for specimen seekers Sternberg and Lamb.

Early drilling core identified seams of coal on the open land in and around the present-day town of Three Hills. The discovery of coal drove investors from Montreal to push the

Grand Trunk Pacific Railway north as well as the Canadian Pacific Railway to develop a competitive spur. Towns grew along the two railway lines: Acme, Swalwell, Linden, Sunnyslope, Allingham, Torrington, Wimborne, Twining, Three Hills, Equity, Trochu, Huxley, Carbon to Hesketh. Some didn't: the area's first post office, Rodinville - 1903 lost out to Swalwell where the GTP investors could control the village layout. Settlements that already had started elsewhere (including Three Hills on the Flat, and Trochu in the St. Ann's ranch valley) moved to the railway track. The twisting, twining railway followed the deep grooved trail of the buffalo who had found the most efficient incline over the centuries; still it was a 1% grade for the railway, a fact that slows the three-mile long trains today (just south of the once bustling hamlet of Twining.) Carts had followed this trail carrying settlers as well as coal to Acme, Beiseker and Calgary; the trail became the first Highway 21, flanking the ESE side of the three hills and on to Trochu and Buffalo Lake.

A resourceful group of people stayed; they diversified, sharing many talents, skills and a strong work ethic. And they knew hard work! As these settlers were a peaceable lot, preoccupied primarily with the essentials for survival for themselves and their neighbours, they gave little trouble to the Northwest Mounted Police and the subsequent Alberta Provincial Police. Instead, homesteaders were preoccupied with breaking the prairie with steam power and planting. They worked the cattle camps, mowed and sold hay, built railways, fences, buildings, elevators and schools, worked the lands and the mines and drove the wagon-loads to Acme, Calgary, Red Deer and other places, blacksmithed, built houses and barns, operated stopping houses, bartered, dairied, built a steam plant, installed early telephone lines, made moonshine—anything to trade or turn to advantage. Some speculated and traded land. Farm women and their families planted and tended gardens, milked the cows and sold cream, butter and cheese in town, kept pigs, sheep, cattle and horses, chickens, ducks and turkeys, trapped and tanned furs, sewed, knitted, butchered, dried and salted meat, pickled, cooked and baked, canned extensive supplies of meat, vegetables and berries for the winter. Nearby mine women cooked, gardened, washed clothes and took care of children, neighbours—and the miners who batched in the nearby shacks. hall. Some taught school. More than 77 country schools were built across the open land that now comprises Kneehill County. The earliest rural school relating to the settlement on the flat, the Three Hills Rural School #1730 was built in 1908, serving the families of the flat, the mines and area farms. (Note: Although moved in 1921 to its present location off Hwy 582 near the Three Hills Creek, it withstood the move and presently serves as a rural community hall with newly installed--first-time in almost a hundred years--hot and cold running water and restrooms..

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Building of GTP Railroad, on the SE side of Signal Hill, the most easterly of the three hills. Kneehill Historical Society Collection,

Three Hills

The coming of the railway. Stimulated by the discovery of coal, the coming of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway in 1911 caused the exodus of businesses and buildings, relocating just south of the distinctive three hills, just north of newly discovered coalmines--and, as it turned out, to the east side of the track. Although the GTP had ambitiously surveyed and laid out a village site on the west side of the GTP track, even to the point of building the first Station House on the West side, plans were afoot with local speculators for the east side. It is said that late

one night, it was a card game that determined the site be established on the east side! The first building to be moved—the Pratt’s Creamery--was an important building as it’s upper floor served not only as living quarters for the Pratt family but as the social, church (Methodist and Presbyterian) and community hall. Already, an Anglican church was in place. Other businesses / structures followed, lining Main Street, and adjacent side streets, and by 1912, Three Hills officially became a village. It’s growing population and surrounding area over-crowded its first school, accommodating 120 students in its two rooms. Almost from the day of the school’s opening, a larger one was in planning, to be on the NE edge of the village on land donated by Meiklejohn. The Independent Order of Oddfellows built a large hall, to be used for community events as well as their meetings and the Hefron Hotel anchored the opposite end of Main Street. Investors, storekeepers and churches filled Main Street. Entrepreneurs looked at the ready supply of coal as a source for steam generated power, heat and electricity, all which were to impact Three Hills’ future development.

How little the first explorers understood the resources available to the resilient people of the Kneehill area!



Three Hills Village Main Street, c. 1911, three years following the exodus from the Flat.

OUR PRECIOUS HERITAGE



The Three Hills that have been a landmark for indigenous people for centuries and for over two centuries, other Canadians looking for opportunities.

Imagine a scouting party of Blackfoot cresting the top of one of these hills to survey the prairie below. (minus the neat rows of swathed grain and the utility poles)

The Three Hills story was written by Rosalie Lammle of Three Hills, she also provided the images. Rosalie is a member of the Kneehill Historical Museum and current president of CARMN. (Central Alberta Museums Network)