

The Central Alberta Historical Society Newsletter

ROD TRENTHAM
43 DOBLER AVE
RED DEER AB
T4R 1X6 *Summer*

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Salute to Innisfail and Citizens Who Preserve their History

Innisfail began as Poplar Grove, a freight and stage stop on the Edmonton Calgary trail. Palliser's land survey crew found a fertile area of rich black soil. An early stopping house, The Spruces, four miles north of the settlement was built in 1884. This log building stands today as the first building in Innisfail's remarkable 2.5 acre Historical Village. The CPR railway renamed the village as Innisfail. Their tracks swung east of the old trail and east of Red Deer River Crossing for a station on the Gaetz land, the present site of Red Deer. As Dean Jordan relates in the following article it was another building that sparked the organization that became their Historical Society.



The Spruces

Innisfail and District Historical Society

As is true of many things, the Innisfail Historical Village had a very humble beginning. The first organizational meeting of the Innisfail and District Historical Society was held on December 15, 1969. Chairman Bill Peters informed those present that a newly proposed Treasury Branch building was to be constructed and that he and other citizens of Innisfail wished to retain

the building that existed at that time as a possible library/museum, should the government intend to demolish the structure. Although this proposal failed to be successful, out of this meeting came the realization that a location for the Town and area photos, records and artifacts needed to be established. As a result of this meeting the Innisfail and District Historical Society became a reality under the direction of President Bill Peters, Vice President Norman Sveinson, Secretary Denise Stafford-Mayer and Directors Bob Piesse, Donna Chadwick, Jack Scarlett, Eric Waldram and Frank Malcolm.

For the next several months, meetings were held in the Innisfail Royal Canadian Legion. In April of 1971 it became known that a log cabin of historical importance was being donated to the 'Society' by Doug Gibson. This log structure had been built in the late 1880s and was used as a stopping house on the Calgary-Edmonton stage-coach trail. The Town of Innisfail was then approached for a suitable site to relocate this structure known as the 'Spruces'. At the April 27, 1971 meeting it was reported by the Society President that the Innisfail Mayor and Council had approved the Society's application for a site which we know today as the grounds of the Innisfail Historical Village.

At this time Society members discussed "whether an orthodox museum with exhibits or a historical village reconstructed as the living past" would be best for the future. From this meeting it appeared the membership was overwhelmingly in favor of a historical village.

In 1973, three homestead buildings were donated by the G. Hoar family. Also in 1973, the book section of the Society chaired by

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Innisfail

Donna Chadwick, published 'Candlelight Years', a history of Innisfail and District pioneers. This was followed by the relocation of a blacksmith shop and in 1976 the relocation of the Bowden CPR Station.

Other buildings followed, but mention must be made and special tribute given, to the following 'regulars' who in the early years devoted hundreds of hours to this work and their names are: Irvin Bittorf, Elmer Browne, Jack Scarlett, John Stevenett, Ford Twissell, Doug Gibson and Dr. Peggy Godkin. Because of vision, hard work and community cooperation the official opening of the Innisfail and District Historical Village was held on Friday, September 6, 1974.

Mandate: The Innisfail and District Historical Society was formed in 1969 and incorporated as a Society in 1970. According to the By-laws of the Innisfail and District Historical Society (revised 1998), the purpose of the Society is to promote the preservation, interpretation and enjoyment of local history. This purpose is to be achieved through:

1. programs arranged for general meetings and other activities that support that purpose developing and maintaining an Historical Village with structures, furnishings and artifacts to illustrate and/or implement the history of Innisfail and the District
2. preserving on-going history through collections of related press clippings, letters, photographs and other artifacts of events and persons in the area.

As was previously noted, the Innisfail Historical Village originated in the early 1970s with the purpose of preserving and housing the history of the Innisfail District. It is located on 2½ park-like acres of land within the town of Innisfail and consists of 16 structures and a machinery storage area. The structures include a tea room, machine sheds, mobile bunkhouse, church, railway station and blacksmith shop. A new Boardwalk Building was completed in 1999/2000. It includes an office, rooms to house artifacts and a pioneer school.

A Heritage Garden, featuring a collection of plants from homesteader and pioneer gardeners was established in 2001. With assistance from the Innisfail Garden Club a children's vegetable garden was introduced in 2001. Children plant the seeds and harvest the produce.

A Manager and two summer students are hired from May until the September long weekend. During this period the Village is open Monday - Sunday from 11:00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m.

Currently the 'Village' hosts daily tours, special event days, programs for children, school tours, Friday teas, and is becoming more and more a multi-use community center.



**Pictures and article contributed by
Dean Jordin**

The present Innisfail and District Historical Board is: President Clayton Ross, Vice President Carolyn Mick, Secretary Lynda Macdonald, Treasurer Lawrence Gould, Lyle Boyd, Douglas Gibson, Reed Markham, Ernie Dyck, Marg Hallett and Dean Jorden. The Historical Village opens for the summer season on May 26 with a pancake breakfast and a car show and shine. August 18 is 4:00 PM pig roast and an evening of entertainment. Teas will be held every Friday afternoon all summer long.

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Innisfail

On May 30 a day tour of two Innisfail sites has been arranged as part of Historic Red Deer Week. The tour will leave the Red Deer Museum at 9:00 AM. We will be received and given an interpreted visit to the Historical Village, lunch in the tea room at noon and a guided tour of the Innisfail Natural Area in the afternoon before returning to Red Deer at 4:00 PM. Fee for lunch and village, 12.00 dollars. A 14 passenger van transportation is available for early registrants at 5.00 dollars, shared cost. Contact Janet 347 0660, janetw@telus.net.

Changes in Red Deer and District Historical Institutions

CAHS members have a long-standing interest and participation in the Heritage Preservation Committee. Its present board membership represents: Parkland Community Planning, Red Deer County Community Services, City of Red Deer Recreation Parks and Culture, Red Deer River Naturalists, Red Deer Main Street Project, Normandeau Society and four members at large. Currently there are also three statutory members: Paul Gowans, Executive Director of the Normandeau Society, Jim Robertson and Michael Dawe. Agendas and minutes are sent to the City Manager, the City Director of Community Services and the Manager of Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery.

The Heritage Preservation Committee originated as a sub-committee of the Normandeau Society, however the main function of the Normandeau Society was to develop and implement service plan management agreements for the Museum, the Kerry Wood Nature Centre and the Waskasoo Park Interpretive Program.

Red Deer City has put in place a new Heritage Management Plan that implements a number of changes. Restructuring is in progress that creates separate management boards for the Museum and for the Kerry Wood Nature Centre and Waskasoo Park Interpretive Program. These boards will negotiate directly with the city. This effectively dissolves the present Normandeau Society. These structural changes also make a new entity necessary for the Heritage Preservation Committee.

As mentioned in the winter edition of the CAHS newsletter the name of the Museum no longer includes the words, "and district". It is now Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery. Red Deer and District Archives has a direct budget from the city but its name denotes its county inclusion. As a matter of fact a large portion of their archived material is of county origin. Many citizens of both municipal jurisdictions are concerned about a bifurcation of historical interests. Perhaps the new city/county land use agreement is an indication of rapprochement and the efforts of a new Heritage Preservation Committee will continue to include both city and county.

Coming Events

May 4 & 5 Regional Historical Fair at Parkland Mall. Students whose historical projects have been chosen from among their schools' selection of students' projects, will bring their exhibits to Red Deer for display and evaluation. Coordinated by Rod Trentham, program director for the Museum and this year's assistant, Alexis Milinusic. CAHS through its casino effort is a funder for this Regional Fair. Lethbridge is the host of the National Historical Fair in early July.

May 17, 7:30 CAHS program at the Museum. Paul **Boutbee** will present a historic look at central Alberta newspapers. This is a very timely topic in view of Red Deer Advocate's 100 years of publication. Paul is an extraordinary citizen of many talents including drama.

May 17 will complete the public presentations series of CAHS until September AGM.

May 25 to 27 The Historical Society of Alberta Annual General Meeting, Calgary at the downtown Ramada Hotel. The theme of this conference is the 100th anniversary of HAS. Past presidents will be honoured including three CAHS people. Contact Wanda Bornn, 780-439-2797 or events@historicedmonton.ca for registration details. For space on a Red Arrow bus to and from Calgary for the AGM phone Don Hepburn at 342-2245.

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**May 28, Historic Preservation Awards
11:00 AM at Red Deer County Centre.**

City and county nominees who are preservers of the past will be honoured according to the merits of their nomination. They are chosen from five categories:

1. Restoration and/or adapted re-use of heritage buildings
2. New design compatible in a heritage context
3. Neighborhood or community revitalization
4. Conservation and preservation of natural features or built heritage
5. Significant interpretation, publication, research, or education in the area of heritage.

Heritage Preservation Awards are the responsibility of a joint city and county ad-hoc committee of the Heritage Preservation Committee.

**May 26 –June 2
Historic Red Deer Week 2007**

This is the fifth annual Historic Red Deer Historic Week. It continues to operate under the auspices of CAHS. The organizing committee is: Chair Don Hepburn, Ray Congdon, Lorna Johnson, Rod Trentham, Darlo Albrecht, Shelley Respondek and Marguerite Watson. Sheryl Krill, the coordinator, hopes that the later dates will provide warmer weather for the events and that many organizations will participate and host an event. Brochures will be available in May and also posted on www.historicreddeerweek.com.

June 7-10 Buffaloes to Buckaroos

The CAHS spring bus tour. Anyone not yet registered who wants to go should do so and/or go on the waiting list. Registrations available at the Museum.

**Review Summaries of
Recent CAHS Public Presentations**

Harms Way

Max Foran's presentation titled *Harm's Way: Disasters in Western Canada* on January 18 was fast paced. It was a sociologically based history given by an Alberta historian immersed in our history and primed to share it. He edited the book, *Harm's Way*, and selected authors who wrote from their research on topics that reflect how people of the time were affected by disastrous events. As he said in his introduction concerning the public fascination with loss of life: "... the mundane is more significant in terms of change or impact." And; " the slower unfolding of history is a far greater change agent than individual events no matter how momentous at the time."

In this connection he dealt briefly with four such cumulative history shapers:

Hugh Dempsey on smallpox in which he argues that the periodic smallpox outbreaks among native peoples led to starvation, loss of leadership, family dislocations, curtailment of hunting grounds and ultimately an inability to resist the relentless western march of European. In her article on the **Influenza epidemic** of 1918 that killed 50,000 Canadians, a number approaching the Canadian death toll in WW1, **Janice Dickin** properly notes that this major catastrophe had widespread repercussions but has escaped public attention. The fact too that it occurred in western Canada showed even then our vulnerability to international pandemics.

Jack Bumsted writing about the **Winnipeg floods** showed how the city and the province developed a culture of flood control. The Red River Floodway project moved more earth than during the construction of the Panama Canal or the St. Lawrence Seaway.

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summaries

In a sobering even chilling article on **weeds** in which BC historian **Clint Evans** argues that weed infestation contains the seeds, both figuratively and literal, for a long range catastrophe of unimaginable proportions.

Modern technology can shield us from the worst effects in the short term but without fundamental changes in the ways we interact with the environment" we are simply passing the problem on to future generations. By then it may be too late.

Max Foran spoke at greater length about four widely known disasters, but asked the audience to consider that the ...

"disasters are important but of equal significance is how the professional historians have used them to make their points." This article will summarize the two that happened in Alberta, but both the quality of the writing and the content promise new insights into Western Canadian History for those who read all of Max Foran's *Harms Way: Disasters in Western Canada*.

The Frank Slide

"**Lorry Felske** wrote a classic academic article that focused on the disaster itself and that also contained an attempt to place coal mining within the wider context of western Canadian industrial development. Felske saw the disaster as a potential threat to this order." In his remarks on the Frank Slide, Max Foran relayed that the mine was owned by two Americans, Henry Frank and Samuel Gebo. The CPR bought the total coal production of the mine. The mine, opened in 1901 produced 16 thousands tons in its first year of production and ten times as much, two years later.

By the time of the slide, April 29, in 1903 a tunnel for coal removal had been dug into the mountain 627 feet with no timber supports. Seventy people were buried under millions of cubic yards of rock. The mine reopened in 23 days.

Atlantic No. 3 Blow-out

"This article by UBC historian **David Breen** documents a different kind of disaster, one that lasted over six months; one that cost no lives but the potential of which constituted an environmental nightmare as well "as a new and frightening experience for the fledgling oil and gas industry."

Sixty years ago, when the Imperial number one well blew black crude oil into the sky near Leduc, a transformative change for Albertans began. It continues in the present. A provincial government policy of, a regular and efficient access process for companies to extract, process and sell this province's petroleum resources,* was legislated. Government appointed boards were put in place to ensure that this pervasive industry could proceed with little impediment.

It was the dramatic and devastating blow out of Atlantic number 3 well that publicized the petroleum potential of this province. This was a disaster at the time for the land and people who lived there. The well blew on March 8, 1948. Oil, gas and mud shot up 150 feet into the air. This toxic flood of material from five thousand feet below the surface of the earth continued to flow onto the land around the well for months. On September 6 the well caught fire and burned for 4 days. Nine months after the disaster began, in December the well was finally plugged and cemented.

*Information Source: David Breen, *The Making of Modern Alberta* page 555 of Alberta Formed and Transformed, 2006, published by U of A and U of C presses.

Eggs for Shoes and Forever Pioneers

Eddie Postill's, presentation on February 15, was a sharp contrast to the January Foran event. Eddie Postill told a gentle story of her pioneer lineage. Many of the anecdotes told of events that were of immediate threat to her ancestors that were living them, but the tone of the evening was laudatory and revealed history over a long period of time. She writes and gives presentations on the life stories of both her paternal and maternal grandparents.

Both of her books, *Eggs for Shoes* (1995) and *Forever Pioneers* (2006) are self published and a reading treat for those who enjoy fiction written from generational family accounts.

Her description of the evening follows.

My talk focused on the early arrival of my Grandfather, William Postill in Red Deer in 1895. I also spoke about the time my Grandma Benedict spent in Red Deer a few years later.

Wm. Postill came from England to Ontario, to Kelowna and then Red Deer. He raised cattle and when there was not enough grass for them in the dry Okanagan he moved to Red Deer. He put his cattle on shares out at Ewing, East of Stettler. William Postill had one of the first stores in Red Deer and missed being the first mayor by one vote. He sold his house to the town and it became Red Deer's first Fire Hall. He was active on the School Board and at one time owned the entire city square. He also took cattle to England to sell. He definitely left his mark on the development of Red Deer.

My maternal Grandparents, Roy and Bertie Benedict came to Wimborne in 1902. When their children finished the one room school they heard about the Presbyterian College opening at Red Deer. My mother and her sister were two of the first students to attend. My mother won the gold medal for the top student in 1917. Grandpa bought a house in Red Deer and moved Grandma and the children to Red Deer for the duration of their attendance at the College.

Both sets of grandparents were awesome

pioneers and I have captured their stories in two books - fiction based on facts - *Eggs For Shoes* and *Forever Pioneers*.

The Ku Klux Klan in Central Alberta

Many in the audience for Dr. William Baergen's presentation on March 16 will remember the charter meeting of CAHS June, 1998. The guest speaker of the evening was Bill Baergen speaking about his just completed account of the role of the Ku Klux Klan in our history. Some far sighted board members of the new society, in consideration of the publishing mandate of the CAHS constitution, realized what an appropriate endeavor it would be to publish Bill's book. It became the first of the four books published by the CAHS Publications Committee. In his initial presentation more than ten years ago, not only were we introduced to his writing but we were also introduced to a man who has been an invaluable contributor to our chapter activities ever since.

Donna Baergen assisted Bill with the documentation that he has accumulated on this topic. He recounted that he wrote this book due to his long time interest in human rights and to reveal the role that elitist cult leaders have played in our history. All copies of the first printing of this book have been sold and it has gone to a second printing. Copies are available from the society and at the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery, as well as in many local libraries. His presentation was well received,

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**CENTRAL ALBERTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
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**Editor Janet Walter
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