

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

FAMOUS BLACK CANADIANS

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CAHS Programs 2015

February 15: **Black History in Central Alberta**

Keystone Settlement speaker Allan Goddard, Manager of Breton and District Museum. The Breton museum has a national and international reputation for its restoration of the Keystone Cemetery where many of the Black Settlers are buried. Allan will speak about this early community.

March: **History of Sunnybrook Farms**

Ex-director of Sunnybrook farms, dedicated to the history of farming in Central Alberta.

April: **Farmers Market - Dennis Moffat**

Everybody knows about the Red Deers Farmers Market held every Saturday morning all summer, but do you know how it got started? Everybody knows Dennis but do you know all the trials and tribulations he has dealt with over the years?

May: **Bus tour to Lacombe**

Come and see the many historic buildings in Lacombe. The FlatIron building, the Michener House and many more. Lunch will be included. More information will be included in the next CAHS newsletter or phone the program director Faye.



Lacombe FlatIron Building

A Brief Overview of Black History in Canada and in Alberta

By Bill Mackay

Revolution in 1776 about 3,500 free Black Americans came to Canada, mostly to Nova Scotia where they suffered discrimination both by the local residents and the government. In addition about 2,000 enslaved Blacks were brought to Canada by white United Empire Loyalists. Subsequently, in 1792, a large contingent free Blacks left for Sierra Leone where they formed Freetown. Another wave of free Black immigrants to Canada followed, the Maroons came to Canada from Jamaica in 1796 but they too moved on to Freetown in Sierra Leone in 1800.

Another wave of Black immigration to Southern Ontario followed the war of 1812. The next wave of Black immigration to Ontario and Nova Scotia was via the Underground Railroad between the late 1820s and the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861. In 1858 a large group of Black Americans immigrated to British Columbia from California.

While Black people, mostly single males, would have been part of the fabric of early immigrants to Alberta none achieved the recognition and fame of John Ware. John was born a slave in 1845 and likely became a free in about 1865 at the close of the American Civil War. He grew up in Texas where he learned horsemanship and ranching skills. In 1882 he was hired to help drive 3000 head of cattle from Texas to the Bar U Ranch in southwestern Alberta. He stayed in the area working for large ranches including the Bar U and Quorn Ranches. He was a big man and very strong. Legend had it there wasn't a horse he couldn't ride or a cow he couldn't rope. He started his own ranch on the Sheep River near present day Millarville in 1890. In 1892 Ware married Mildred Lewis a Black woman whose family had moved to Calgary from Ontario. Increasing settlement in the foothills and fencing of the open range eventually made ranching there too difficult there. By 1900 Ware moved to a new ranch site on the Red Deer River east of Brooks, near Millicent, where he built a home for his wife and five children. Mildred died from pneumonia and typhoid in April 1905 and John died in September when his horse tripped in a badger hole and fell. John Ware's abilities as a cowboy were legendary. His funeral was the biggest Calgary had seen up to that time.

John and Mildred's cabin is preserved in Dinosaur Provincial Park. A Junior High School and a creek are named after him. In 2012 a Canadian stamp was issued in his honor. In 1901 about 37 Black settlers were documented living in Alberta. That number was soon to increase with approximately 1,000 emigrating from Oklahoma between 1908 and 1911. This was in response to advertising by the Canadian government promoting emigration to western Canada. However the Federal Government of the time did

not target the ads to Black Americans and they took legislative action in 1911 to discourage Black immigration. Some settled in Edmonton but many formed their own communities in rural areas such as: Amber Valley, near Athabasca, called Pine Creek until 1931, Junkins near Chip Lake & Wildwood west of Edmonton, Keystone (now Breton) between Pigeon Lake and Drayton Valley, and Campsie west of Barrhead.

Amber Valley is perhaps the best known of these communities. It was first settled in 1910 by about 40 Black families including Jordan Murphy and Jefferson Davis Edwards. In 1911 another group of about 150 led by Parson H. Sneed a clergyman arrived from Oklahoma. They were detained at the Emerson, Manitoba border due to Federal legislation designed to discourage Black immigration to Canada. An Order in Council, valid for one year, had been passed prohibiting Black people from immigrating to Canada. In the end the order was never invoked however the door was effectively shut to Black immigration.

Amber Valley was a farming community but in the early days, like their White neighbors, the residents of Amber Valley worked off the farm, particularly in winter, at lumber, freighting and other jobs to earn much needed cash. Of the 95 families who originally settled in Amber Valley 75 stayed long enough to prove up on homesteads.

At its height Amber Valley had a population of about 300 settlers. Some, like Bob Jamerson and Columbus Bowen enlisted in WWI. They were part of the all Black No. 2 Construction Battalion, the only segregated battalion in Canada's history. They went overseas on March 17, 1917. The Amber Valley baseball team was founded in 1926 by J.D. Edwards and was one of the best teams in northern Alberta through the 1930s & 40s. Beginning in the 1950s many descendants of the original Amber Valley immigrants, like rural young people elsewhere in northern Alberta, moved to Edmonton. In Edmonton they founded the Shiloh Baptist Church one of the only Black churches in western Canada.

The early farming heritage of Amber Valley is remembered by the Obadiah Place Heritage Society which is dedicated to preserving the house and farmstead in Amber Valley of Obadiah Bowen whose family was one of the original settlers of Amber Valley.

Following the lifting of restrictions on Black immigration in 1962 the main source of Black immigrants to Canada and Alberta was from the Caribbean. Today about 70% of Black people in Canada are of Caribbean heritage most of the remaining 30% are descendants of the original Black settlers.

Early Black History in Central Alberta

By Michael Dawe

There were few Blacks living in Alberta at the beginning of the last century and most were in Calgary or Edmonton. The 1901 federal census found only 27 Blacks living in what was then known as the Territory of Alberta.

Among the first Blacks to live in Central Alberta were Edward (George) Thompson and his family. He was born in Missouri, the son of Virginia slaves. He married his wife Hattie in 1888. Their daughter Latechange was born in Nebraska in May 1894. The family lived in Iowa and then South Dakota, before moving to the Fort MacLeod area of Southern Alberta in 1904. Edward got a job as a hoof trimmer for horses on the local ranches. Before long, the Thompsons moved to the Magic/Earlville district, south east of Ponoka, where Edward took out a homestead. Tragedy struck in early February 1907. The winter was one of the worst on record. Deep snow forced Edward to take a detour from his usual route to the Earlville store and post office, which was some 6½ kilometers away. Despite the detour, the trip through the heavy snow was exhausting. Edward collapsed on the return journey. He was found frozen to death along the trail, less than a kilometer away from his home and safety.

After Edward's death, Hattie and Latechange moved to Ponoka, where Hattie took in boarders, did laundry and cleaned other people's houses. In 1918, Latechange had a daughter Alice. Interestingly, while there is an entry in the records of the Forest Home Cemetery in Ponoka for Latechange, dated January 1, 1918, she is listed in the 1921 Canadian census as still living in Ponoka with her mother Hattie and daughter Alice. The Thompsons eventually moved to Edmonton in the mid to late 1920's. Hattie passed away on August 28, 1936 and is buried in the Edmonton Beechmount Cemetery.

Beginning in 1908, noticeable numbers of Blacks began immigrating to Alberta, mainly from Oklahoma. Although there were no formal rules against their immigration, there were a great many informal rules which restricted their ability to cross the border into Canada. In 1911, the Edmonton Board of Trade made a major effort to have the Canadian government ban further

immigration of Blacks into Canada. The organizers of the petition argued that Black settlers would be "ill-suited to the cold climate of Canada", ignoring the fact that many Afro-Americans from the northern States experienced just as harsh of winters as Canadians. When the Edmonton Board of Trade's petition was referred to its Red Deer counterpart, two local members vigorously opposed supporting the measure. They were Raymond Gaetz, first mayor of the Town of Red Deer and Francis Galbraith, first mayor of the City of Red Deer. Both men were vehemently against such a racist proposal.

Despite the growing province-wide backlash against Blacks moving to Alberta and increasing federal restrictions against their immigration, some still continued to arrive. Two of those were Samuel Watts and his wife Margaret. Samuel was born in Texas on May 25, 1882 and moved to Southern Alberta with Margaret around 1912. He eventually got a job as a cook in the Olds area, probably in the lumber camps west of the town along the Red Deer River.

In the summer of 1916, although he was 34 years old, Samuel enlisted with the 187th Battalion in Innisfail. His wife moved to Calgary after his enlistment. Sam became a trumpeter in the regimental band. After he was overseas, he was transferred into the 50th Battalion of Calgary. On the night of August 22, 1915, near Lens, France, Sam offered to take another man's place in a trench raid. Tragically, he was killed. He is buried in the Lapugnoy Military Cemetery in the Pas-de-Calais region of Northern France.

A person with very deep roots in Alberta, but who did not move to Red Deer until the early 1960's was Vernet (Vern) King. He was born in the Keystone community near Breton, Alberta in 1918. He was the son of John and Stella King. His grandparents had moved to Keystone from Oklahoma in 1911. The Keystone community began to break up during the First World War. Some of the families moved back to the United States. Others joined the Canadian Army for service overseas. his father got a job as a sleeping car porter with the C.P.R., while his mother got work as a seamstress.

Early Black History in Central Alberta

Michael Dawe

The Thompson Family Story

Submitted by: Sandy Allsopp.

(Museum Manager, Fort Ostell Museum.)

Vern King's family moved to the Sunnyside-Hillhurst district of Calgary in 1919 where Vern had a brother Theodore, a sister Lucille and another sister Violet; who had a very distinguished legal career. After graduating from the Crescent Heights High School, she attended the University of Alberta. She became the vice-president of the Student's Union. After completing her undergraduate degree, she enrolled in the U. of A. Law School, graduating with her L.L.B. in 1953. She was the first Black person to graduate from that law school. She then articulated with the famous Calgary criminal lawyer, Edward J. McCormick. When she was admitted to the bar on June 2, 1954, she became the first Black woman lawyer in Canada.

Unfortunately, Red Deer still had serious problems with overt racial discrimination around the time that Vern King moved to the City. A restaurant near the old Windsor Hotel posted a "White's only" signs in its window. The sign was removed after the vigorous protests by the Red Deer Ministerial Association.

In 1964, Vern got a job at the Red Deer General Hospital. He later worked as a construction labourer and then as a janitor. He briefly operated a small shoe shine stand on Gaetz Avenue, north of 51 Street. Vern suffered from poor health in his later years. He passed away at his home in North Red Deer on June 3, 1985. He was predeceased by a daughter Donna, but was survived by his daughters Marlene and Karen, both of Edmonton.

One of the little known jobs at the museum is to assist people doing research to trace family history. One such request this winter has brought to light a very interesting story about one of our homesteading families. Ironically, February is Black History Month in Alberta and the Thompson family was the first Negro family to settle in our district. Edmond and Hattie Thompson and their little girl, Latechange, arrived in the Ponoka area in 1904. The Thompson family were slaves from Kentucky or Louisiana and they arrived in Alberta thanks to the "Underground Railway". What a trip that must have been.

Edmond secured a homestead, a ¼ section, east of Ponoka in the Magic District. Homestead fees were \$10.00 and the homesteader had to cultivate 10 – 15 acres each year for 3 years to obtain clear title. The land that The Thompson family received had an abundance of trees which Edmond was able to fell and deliver to town for firewood. During the harsh winter of 1907, Edmond had delivered a load to town but unfortunately on the way home encountered a severe snow storm and froze to death. Unable to manage the farm on her own, Hattie had to give up the homestead and move into Ponoka with Latechange.

- Hattie took in Laundry to provide the necessities for her and Latechange. Latechange was enrolled in school as there are pictures of her at the Magic School. According to the Canada Census of 1916, both Hattie and Latechange did laundry. Latechange contracted T.B. And, as was the custom in the early years, patients with this highly contagious disease, were admitted to the Insane Asylum in Ponoka.

- at age 24, in 1918 Latechange died. She had given birth to a daughter, Nellie, who then resided with her Great Grandmother Hattie. In 1936 Hattie and Nellie moved to Edmonton to secure better employment. Hattie passed away in Edmonton in 1966 at the age of 108.

Fredrick (Fred) Hall

As told by: Frank Siquerdson

Fred Hall was born in Warren County, Iowa April 1, 1867. Fred came to Innisfail in the spring of 1903 in a boxcar, caring for the household effects for a settler from Des Moines. He spent several years working on farms around Innisfail. In 1934 he came to the Centerville district, five miles north of Markerville, to farm.

Freds house was 1/4 mile from our house and my siblings and I liked to visit him often. Once when I was four, I got up before everyone else in my house and walked down to Fred's, when my parents realized I was gone they knew where to look first. It was in the fall with frost on the ground, my mom said I wasn't dressed and was barefoot.

Another childhood memory was when I was six, Fred made me coffee and I wanted cream in it and he didn't have any, I guess I put up a fuss so he gave me butter. I knew butter was made from cream so I was happy even though it curdled and made an oily sheen on the top.

Fred came to our house every night at about nine pm to listen to the news on our radio. The kids would go outside to watch for him, he always whistled while he walked and we could hear him coming. Fred was a good neighbour and a good friend to everyone in the district. He will always be remembered as a gentle man with stories of people and places he knew and the way of life in the southern states. Ill health required him to move to Innisfail and then to Fillmore, Saskatchewan to be with his sister-in-law and several nieces and nephews. Fred passed away in 1959 at the age of 92 and is buried in the Fillmore cemetery.



Fred and His Eldest Brother Benjamin Hall

Another early black pioneer, who came to Alberta just after the turn of the last century, was Fred Douglas Hall. He was born in Warren County, Iowa on April 28, 1865. He came to Alberta in 1903 and was soon working on ranches and farms in the Innisfail area. He became a naturalized Canadian in 1907. In 1911, his older brother Benjamin (Ben) Noble moved to Alberta to join him.

Just after the First World War, Fred and Benjamin moved to Red Deer where they got jobs working as horse trainers at the Red Deer Exhibition grounds. However, Fred eventually moved out to the Centerville district, where he acquired a farm in 1934. As he got older, Fred moved to Innisfail for a while, but then moved to Fillmore, Saskatchewan in 1956 to live with his sister-in-law and her family. Fred passed away in 1959 at the age of 92. He is buried in the Fillmore Cemetery.

Ben left central Alberta, spent his remaining years in Seattle, Washington. He died there in 1932 or 33.

Keystone

**The full story of the Keystone
Settlement will be told by Allen
Goddard at the museum on
February, 15, CAHS meeting.**

Black Settlers Come To Alberta

By Bill MacKay

Although black settlers came to Alberta in relatively small numbers, their history in the province is a unique and courageous one.

There have been black people in Alberta since before the 1870s, mostly single men who worked as fur traders or cowboys. In 1901, 37 black settlers had been documented to live in the province, and, in 1903, an Oklahoma newspaper article documents an exodus of blacks from Oklahoma into Canada.

Between 1908 and 1911 approximately 1,000 black settlers arrived in Alberta from Oklahoma in response to advertising campaigns initiated by the Canadian Immigration Department. Many of them had been forced to sell their land because of racially discriminatory policies, and looked to Canada as a land of tolerance and opportunity. Regrettably, many of their new white and Indian neighbours in Alberta were as little prepared to treat them as equals as had been the Americans, and they usually chose to settle together in rather isolated locations. Some did move to Edmonton or other urban centers, but their prospects there were limited: black men usually worked as railroad porters, and most women found jobs as domestic servants.

The Canadian government never proposed any direct legislation against black immigrants for fear of tainting their public image or damaging their relationship with the United States. Once black settlers started arriving in larger numbers, however, they did rely upon indirect methods to discourage these "undesirables" from undertaking the journey up north. While simultaneously advertised as hospitable and inviting to the American whites, the climate of the Canadian west was presented as much too cold and severe for any blacks. Strict economic and physical standards aimed at restricting newcomers, but most blacks passed the tests. Finally, agents hired by the Canadian government were sent Oklahoma to persuade these potential immigrants that Albertan soil was poor and that they would, in any case, have difficulty crossing the border. These informal policies were effective, and by 1912, black immigration to Alberta had all but ended.

In 1911, the Boards of Trade in Strathcona, Calgary, Ft. Saskatchewan and Morinville had drafted a petition to Prime Minister Laurier opposing the entry of any more blacks into the province. The petition contained over 3,000 signatures.

No one could remove the black settlers who had already arrived, however. Several black communities survived and even thrived in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Amber Valley, Junkins (now Wildwood),

Keystone (now Breton) and Campsie were established by some of Alberta's most resourceful pioneers.

A number of African-Canadians lived on the prairies, including Alberta, early in the 19th century. John Ware is one of the best-known; arriving in 1882 from Texas, he was among the first cowboys in Alberta. He is credited with introducing longhorn cattle to Alberta. His knowledge and skill with livestock have been commemorated by the preservation of his homestead near Brooks, 185 km southeast of Calgary, and several natural sites being named after him.

The first significant Black migration into Alberta took place with the arrival of the "Exodusters." They were Blacks who fled the southern States in 1879, heading for homesteading lands in Kansas; they were familiar with farming in dry or dusty conditions. Oklahoma Blacks were increasingly finding that the laws made it impossible to live as equals.

A small group came to Alberta to investigate the potential for a good home and sent back favourable reports in 1910. Black Oklahomans, increasingly alarmed by 1911 following a series of Ku Klux Klan lynchings, felt they had to seek a more tolerant area in which to live. A Canadian government invitation to mid-western American settlers to come to Alberta and to accept inexpensive land was noted by the African-Americans, but it was clearly not meant for them. In fact everything short of passing laws to exclude Black immigration to Canada was carried out, but the Exodusters were determined, in excellent health, and possessed the basic funds required by law so they eventually settled in communities stretching from western Alberta to the Thunder Bay area.

On August 12, 1911 the Laurier government drafted and approved a remarkable document. The proposed Order in Council read:

For a period of one year from and after the date hereof the landing in Canada shall be [sic] and the same is prohibited of any immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada.

The fact that the government of Canada preferred some immigrants to others was scarcely surprising in 1911. Although not officially ranked by preference, people from Great Britain and northern Europe were favoured, with other Europeans somewhat lower on the list, and Asians of all nationalities lower still. Surprisingly the government hoped to keep some American citizens from entering Canada, while encouraging most others to come. ...

Black Settlers Come To Alberta Continued

... In the end, this Order in Council was never invoked, but the story of how Black Americans came to be deemed "unsuitable" as settlers is fascinating, and disturbing.

There had been Black settlers in western Canada prior to 1905, but they were few in number and most attracted little notice. However, in the early 1900s larger numbers of Black settlers were attracted by a combination of the promotional literature extolling ours as the "Last, Best West," and growing political and economic discrimination in a number of American states, particularly Oklahoma.

Between about 1905 and 1911 over one thousand Black Americans emigrated to western Canada, and thousands more might have come had Canada proved more welcoming. By 1908-09 there were small communities of Black homesteaders at Wildwood, Alberta and near Maidstone, Saskatchewan. Over the next two years a small settlement was established at Campsie, near Barrhead, Alberta, and larger settlements at Breton and Amber Valley, just east of Athabasca, Alberta. Not all found the prospect of homesteading in the bush attractive, and some chose to stay in cities to find work. Edmonton, in particular, attracted a significant number, and by 1910 it was reported that as many as 100 Blacks were living there.

This increasingly visible minority and reports of large parties of Black settlers preparing to come to Canada caused an uproar. The Edmonton Board of Trade led the way, and in 1910 it stated, "We want settlers that will assimilate with the Canadian people and in the negro we have a settler that will never do that." Canadian immigration authorities agreed. Attempts were made to keep Blacks from obtaining immigration literature, and plans were made to use medical inspections and other deterrents to keep Blacks from entering Canada.

One group attracted close attention. Its leader, Henry Sneed, had visited western Canada in 1910 to scout land before returning to Oklahoma to recruit settlers. By early 1911 Sneed and a party of 194 men, women and children were ready to leave for Canada. A second group of about 200 people waited behind to see what would happen when the first reached Canada.

Once in Canada, their progress became the subject of extensive newspaper commentary. In Edmonton, the Board of Trade resumed its leadership role in opposing Black settlement, but now it was supported by other organizations ranging from the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) to the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council. The Board of Trade prepared a petition addressed to Prime Minister Laurier, which was posted prominently in a number of Edmonton area businesses

and taken door to door by canvassers. Despite having a total population of just 25 000 people at the time, some 3000 Edmontonians signed.

The petition read in part:

We, the undersigned residents of the City of Edmonton, respectfully urge upon your attention and that of the Government of which you are the head, the serious menace to the future welfare of a large portion of western Canada, by reason of the alarming influx of Negro settlers.

The Laurier government was vulnerable on this issue, especially as Frank Oliver was both Minister of the Interior - and thus responsible for immigration policy - and the Member of Parliament for Edmonton. The infamous Order in Council was quickly drawn up. Government immigration agents also followed a less direct approach to the issue. They made a concerted effort to convince potential Black settlers that western Canada was not really the "Last, Best West" - at least not for them.

In the end, this campaign and a growing sense on the part of Black community leaders that emigration was not the answer, slowed Black immigration. The government was able to congratulate itself that the crisis had been averted. But for one brief moment, the intolerant face of Canadian society had been starkly revealed.

In the end, most Black settlers made the best of their new homes, despite the poor reception they initially received.

Many have made significant contributions in politics, the arts, sports and other fields. In 1986, for example, many Canadians were probably puzzled over how a remarkable athlete named Reuben Mayes could be the National Football League's Rookie of Year and yet come from North Battleford. Like so many other settlers and their descendants who went on to successful careers, he was just one part of this "unsuitable" aspect of Canadian history.



Arrel and Leon Jamerson with a friend in Amber Valley, Alberta, circa 1940's.



Miss Richson and her car in Amber Valley, Alberta, 1923.



Frank Jamerson, 3rd Battalion Edmonton Fusiliers circa 1939-1945, Amber Valley, Alberta.

Bob Jamerson and Columbus Bowen, circa 1914-1918, Amber Valley, Alberta.



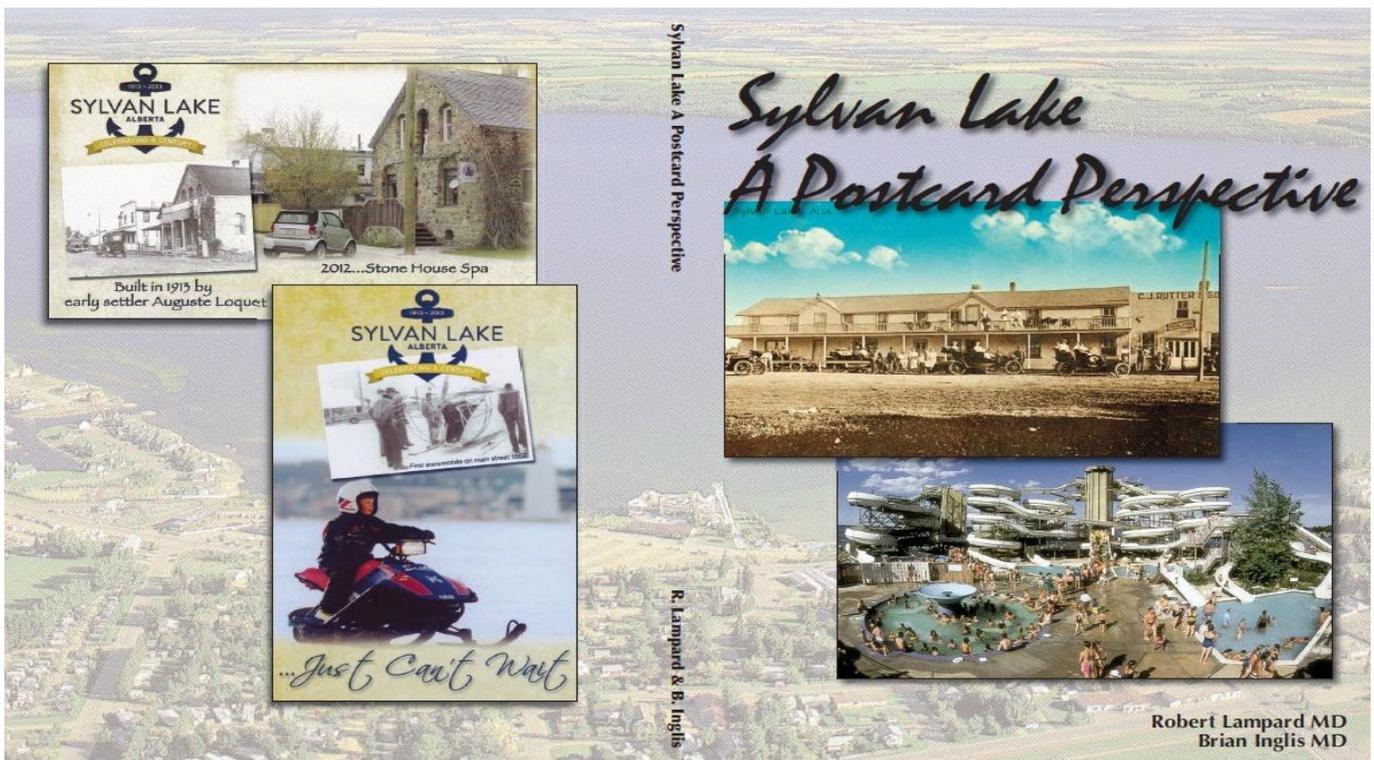
Clarence Coleman in Winnipeg, 1942.



Mary Fair, in Amber Valley, Alberta, 1940.



OUR PRECIOUS HERITAGE



Sylvan Lake has long been known as Alberta's favorite (non-mountain) playground, a reputation earned during the 1920s and 1930s. It's popularity peaked, when the annual Wrigley swim drew up to 15,000 visitors on a summer weekend, 20x the permanent population of 700. They came on CPR and CNR excursion trains and in loaded cars, to enjoy the water activities and wide downtown beach, large enough for a baseball game. Cars would line Lakeshore Drive from the downtown to Lower Camp. In 1931 alone, 70 new cottages were built.

One vacation pastime was to write to friends back home, using less expensive postcards, with the commonest salutation "wishing you were here", or giving highlights of holiday swimming and dancing activities.

Local photographers like Fleming, Jaminette, , Hendrick Bros, Weston and Banff's Harmon responded, by producing some of the more than 200 individual postcards now known to exist. Mostly black and white until the 1970s, they pictured local scenery and landscapes. The most unusual ones were the Freschette cards which were photographs made into "real" or one of a kind postcards from 1900 to 1911.

Ever since his Sylvan Lake arrival, Dr Brian Inglis has shared his interest in postcards of the Lake through a sign in his office. Eventually he accumulated the premier collection of over 130 cards. When coupled with the

collections of Colleen Dunnigan, Jack McCaig, Fred Freschette, and Robert Lampard, the total was enough to publish them. The book became a Sylvan Lake centennial (2013) project.

The history of Sylvan Lake from a Postcard Perspective reveals all but one of the cards were taken in the summertime. Classified into 15 chapters, they cover early Sylvan Lake, the downtown, Sylvan Lake hotels, boats including the Norell, the almost annual changes in the piers, romantic lake scenes and sunsets, cabins and camps and aerial views.

The captions have benefitted from the writings of community authors who compiled Reflections of Sylvan Lake, Recollections Beyond Reflections, News in the First Century and Steve Dill's accumulation of all central Alberta newspapers articles about Sylvan Lake until 1940. They have also relied on the memories of Dr. Inglis' since 1977 and Dr. Lampard's summer visits since 1943.

The second (and last) printing of 100 more copies of the book has recently been received. Copies can be obtained from Dr. Inglis (887-7037) or Dr. Lampard (346-0331) for \$25.00.

Dr. Robert Lampard M.D