Peace Country Historical Society
P.O. Box 687 Station Main
Grande Prairie, AB, T8V 3A8
www.pc-hs-ca

March, 2021
Spring Edition
Volume 11 Issue 1

Keeping History Current

Abandoned Northern Alberta Railways' trestle north of Demmitt
Built in 1931

Upcoming Events

1. Unfortunately COVID19 meeting restrictions remain in place. We are still unable to hold an outdoor meeting for more than 10 people. We need one to allow the membership to vote on a bylaw change that will permit PCHS to use virtual meetings. We will advise you immediately when this changes, as we also need an Annual General Meeting to conduct several pieces of business.

2. The video presentation on the History of the Air Cadets in the Peace Country has been completed. Duff Crerar and his tech crew put in many, many hours, and we thank them for that. The next step is to get it uploaded to our website. Once that is done, members will be contacted with the details on how you can enjoy the show.

Presidents Message

Hello;

This is the spring issue of our Newsletter. There are signs of the season in the air. Snow is melting and water running. Children have their rubber boots on, and are exploring the puddles.

I would like to start on behalf of the members of the PCHS, in thanking Wanda Zenner for serving as our treasurer these past years. She finished her term in December.
Wanda's work assured us that we were always informed, our banking processes were in order, and that financial reports were approved. She was a great asset to our Board.

Wanda is also a prolific writer of articles on the history of the east end of the County of Grande Prairie. We hope she can continue that and wish her the best in future endevours.

And speaking of articles, **our newsletter is in need of some feedback from members.** We would like to know what kinds of topics you would like to read about. There are a many things historical in the Peace Country. People, places, and things, for instance. What would keep your attention? Your input would be greatly appreciated. The editor can be reached at wearmo@telus.net, or phone 587-298-8500

This issue has articles about a lost document, the history of a hamlet, Cold War remnants, and past winter pastimes. Enjoy.

Regards
Pat Wearmouth, PCHS

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REMINDER

Are your membership dues and subscription fees up to date?

We hope you will choose to continue with us. The Historical Society of Alberta keeps the master membership list, and receives dues on our behalf. Please contact them in the Calgary office at:

Phone 403-261-3662

Email – info@albertahistory.org

The office is open for phone calls Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays in the first and third week of each month, from 9:00am to 3:pm

Payment options include sending a cheque or paying by credit card over the phone.

Peace Country Historical Society

P.O. Box 687 Station Main
Grande Prairie, AB T8V 3A8

Vision: To encourage the appreciation of the history of the Peace Country.

Mandate: The mandated area of the Peace Country Historical Society is the Alberta portion of the Peace River Country.

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Newsletter editor:
Pat Wearmouth – wearmo@telus.net
587-298-8500

Till We Meet Again

Our membership has not had a chance to meet since the end of June last year. It is an unfortunate situation, hopefully to be remedied in the coming months. In the interim, we would like to point out:

What We Can Offer

- A chance to help set direction for our Peace Country Chapter, and to learn about Peace Country history, at membership meetings.
- A chance to meet other people who enjoy history.
- A chance to contribute as a volunteer in various projects that we carry out.
- A chance to advocate for the history of our area,
- A chance to get out and see various historical sites in the region

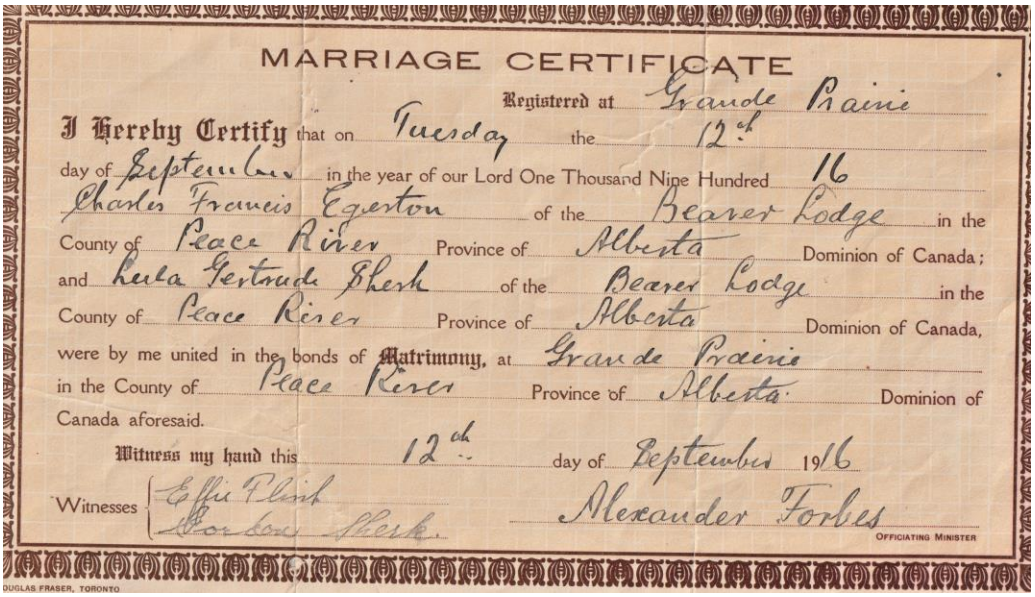
We hope that you choose to continue your membership in our Society.

And if you are not a member yet, please consider joining. The same contacts work for you as well.

The Record of a Marriage

Sometimes things just fall in your lap. Not often, but sometimes.

In November of last year, a librarian at the St. Albert Public Library experienced such an occurrence. As librarians do, she was shaking out returned books, to ensure that readers had not left anything in them. As she checked one of the books, a piece of paper fell out. She saw that it looked old and official. And it was.



MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

Registered at Grande Prairie

I Hereby Certify that on Tuesday the 12th day of September in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred 16 Charles Francis Egerton of the Beaver Lodge in the County of Peace River Province of Alberta Dominion of Canada; and Lula Gertrude Sherk of the Beaver Lodge in the County of Peace River Province of Alberta Dominion of Canada, were by me united in the bonds of Matrimony, at Grande Prairie in the County of Peace River Province of Alberta Dominion of Canada aforesaid.

Witness my hand this 12th day of September 1916

Witnesses Effie Flint, Gordon Sherk

Alexander Forbes
OFFICIATING MINISTER

DOUGLAS FRASER, TORONTO

The paper was a marriage certificate. It had been issued on Tuesday, September 12th, 1916 and attested to the marriage of Charles Francis Edgerton and Lula Gertrude Sherk. The marriage was performed in Grande Prairie by the Reverend Alexander Forbes, a well-known name in the South Peace region. Witnesses were Effie Flint and Gordon Sherk.

Except for the Reverend Forbes, all the names on the Certificate were early settlers in the Lower Beaverlodge district.

A mystery remains as to how the Certificate wound up in the St. Albert library. The librarian forwarded the document to the Peace Country Historical Society's secretary who contacted the family. The Certificate is now in the care of Marlene Hotte, a granddaughter.

An exhibit of the document and story is being developed for display at the South Peace Centennial Museum.

Huallen: Fence Rails to Steel Rails

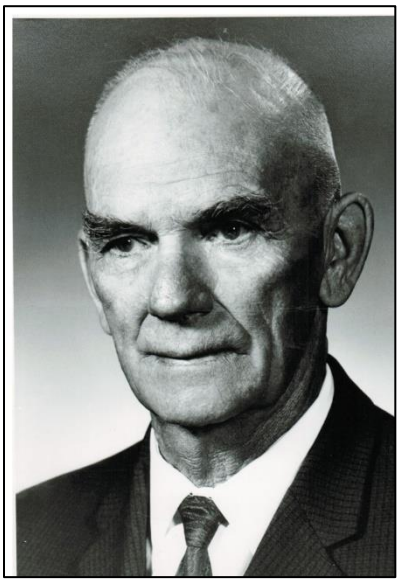
A Personal Perspective by Ron Thoreson

When preparing to tell the story of a small settlement that grew out of the homestead lands twenty miles west of Grande Prairie, it seems I came in during the middle of the second act of a three-act play, so my account may suffer from a limited perspective. The first act was the actual filling in of the local homestead lands; the second was the arrival of the railway and the building of the hamlet; and the third, the winding down and loss of business rationale for the hamlet. On the positive side, I was a third-generation resident of the hamlet, curious by nature, who roamed the full extent of the community from toddler to teen, and there was a lot of local colour to absorb.

Like other hamlets, the service area that Huallen drew from was a function of the travel distance from farms to elevators, the local store and post office, and social/recreation facilities. Whether it was travel by oxen, horses, or early motor vehicles, roads were often seasonal and occasionally impassable. It's difficult to imagine with today's speed of travel, how restricted the community was in those early years when travelling on those unimproved trails.

The future irony was that, as those roads improved, it had a negative effect on the hamlets. Haulage distances to a rail siding that may have been 3 or 4 miles with horses, were greatly extended with early farm trucks. With improved roads, shopping also shifted to larger centres, and the trend continues to this day.

The campaign by the federal government to encourage settlers from Eastern Canada, the U. S., U. K., and Europe meant a wide variety of nationalities would form the Huallen social and trading district. Huallen itself was central to both the Lower Beaverlodge and Mountain Trail communities.



Hugh Allen, circa 1935
Provincial Archives of Alberta

Every family that arrived shared an important sequence of improvements needed to make their lives liveable: a school/social building, a church, roads, and telephones (which used barbed wire fences for lines initially). Improvements usually came through volunteer action. A number of the first homesteaders arrived in 1909 and 1910 as surveying was underway in what became Lower Beaverlodge. Two of the first schools of the "Grande Prairie" region began with classes at Beaverlodge in 1910, and Lower Beaverlodge by 1913. Having arrived from Ontario in 1911, Hugh Allen and his new wife, Mabel Sill, settled on a homestead on NE3 TP71 R9 W6 and filed on an adjoining quarter for his parents who

arrived in 1912. Mabel was the first teacher at Lower Beaverlodge school which was only about a mile NE of their land.

Hugh had a teaching degree himself but, after a job as a chemist in Tweed, Ontario, the government advertising caught his fancy. He also had friends, the Shislers (for whom he had acted as best man) who had joined the Bull Outfit and settled at Lower Beaverlodge the year before. As Hugh worked his farm, he also built support for the United Farmers of Alberta party which came to power in 1921. He ran and won the large Peace River riding in 1926, and was acclaimed for the newly created riding of Grande Prairie in 1930. He served as Minister of Municipal Affairs, and Minister of Lands and Mines from 1934 to 1935, but like every other UFA candidate, was defeated in the Social Credit electoral landslide of 1935.

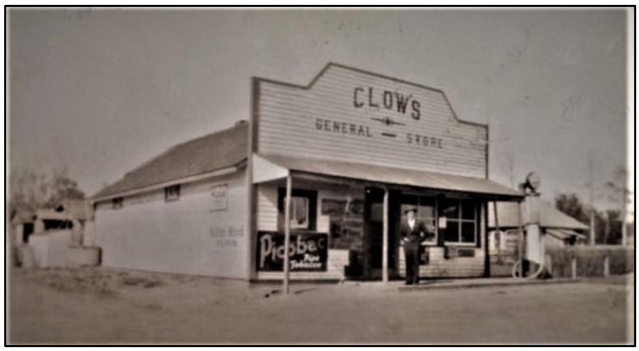
In the summer of 1928, the Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway (soon to be the NAR) pushed through the district on its way from Wembley to Beaverlodge and beyond. In keeping with its practice of establishing sidings every few miles along its rail grade, the E,D&BC put one up on the southern portion of NE22 TP71 R9 W6, on land it had acquired from Idan Thoreson. The first postmaster was Clara Clow, appointed on 16 May 1929. It was probably she who recommended, with community support, that the post office be named “Huallen”.

Nelson and Clara Clow on Saskatoon Mountain circa 1935

The year before, Clara and her husband Nelson, started a store in a tent, while their wood-frame store was being built near the railway siding. Soon, two elevators were able to handle grain, a cooperative stockyard for shipping livestock was in operation, and the bustle of the hamlet quickly grew. The elevators brought agents and their families; the owners of the quarter, Idan and Thilda Thoreson, had three sons and seven daughters, so young bachelors were constantly finding excuses to visit the hamlet.

Idan donated the land, and wood was hauled and sawn for a curling rink and stable, built in 1934, and a hall built in 1935. Nelson Clow was a dedicated curler and a leading force in the hamlet and at the rink, until his departure to Kelowna in 1943, after capturing the ‘43 Grande Prairie Curling Club challenge cup.

As the hamlet grew, the Clows were the payors for the two grain buyers/agents and the Grande Prairie Co-operative Livestock yard where animals were auctioned and shipped out. They also handled the duties of the post office, and that drew neighbours to “community central”: Clow’s store. Volunteers were tasked to put up the



Clow's Store circa 1943

community hall for dances, weddings, funerals, or stage plays. Winter allowed time for curling at the rink. The Thoreson home housed the first telephone exchange that, in later years, was relocated to the store.
Huallen's facilities did not replace, but rather added to the original settler's social hubs - those first and often nearest school buildings. To the south was the Lower Beaverlodge school (1913), and to the north Mountain Trail (1922), both about 3 miles distant from Huallen. Families trading in Huallen generally showed up in the *Dominion Elections Act Rural Polling Division No. 79, Huallen* as shown in 1938. Federal and provincial voting was held at the hall.

To the south, there were the first settler groups from Eastern Canada in Lower Beaverlodge, as well as many German Lutheran families, who arrived in about 1928 from around Stony Plain. They established the St. Johns Lutheran school/church, the school operating until 1962. To the north at Mountain Trail, there were a variety of nationalities represented, including many from Britain and Eastern Europe. Early residents did occasionally travel further afield as whim or necessity dictated, but once settled in, most were soon dealing with the economic privations of the Great Depression of the '30s.

When times were tough, there was an even greater appreciation of, and a necessity for shared labour. Hard times were often relieved by the entertainment talents of family and friends. The bonds of the many families also welcomed many single men and women in community celebrations. While young incoming teachers were often among the notable eligible singles who soon found spouses, there were still several bachelors that lived a solitary life by chance or by choice.

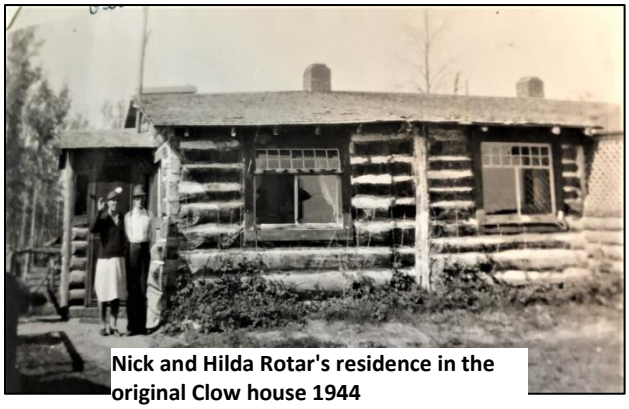
There were even widows prepared to build a second life on a homestead, like Mrs. Rose (Kelly) Pitts. Born in Ontario but having lost her 31-year-old businessman husband in Innisfail in 1906, she eventually filed on a quarter about a mile west of Huallen in 1916. She had trained and worked as a nurse, and built a large house where she hoped to operate a medical facility for settlers who were distant from Grande Prairie. Though it never was used as such, her profound deafness may have been a major cause for her lack of patients.

As a striking younger woman who arrived in 1916 fashionably dressed, she set her table with fine china and excessive silverware that hired farmhands would brush aside to eat. She could still stop traffic though, even in her senior years, as she walked home on the tracks from the Huallen store in her hat and long black dress. At least once, the traffic she stopped was the NAR steam train. The engineer had to stop the train, dismount to catch up to her on foot, and intrude on her silent world to indicate she needed to step aside to let the train pass. She died at her home, aged 80, in 1959.

A number of the local bachelors made do with the basics contained in a 12 by 14-foot granary-sized cabin, but for some, even that was too large. Walter Bowen lived on the south edge of

Saskatoon Mountain in what was a very basic 8 by 10-foot cabin that was more of a root cellar backed into the slope. The size and layout of the cook stove, heater, bunk bed, and table allowed most activities to be conducted without rising from the bed. He had only recently passed away when, as boys, we first rode our bikes at suicide speed down the hairpin turn of the newly-paved Radar Base road.

Walter Irby had his cabin across the Mountain Trail road from the school, and events there were made more amenable with his loaned furniture or extra stable space, and often made more entertaining with his added musical or stage antics. He placed his highest value on any social activities. Another pair of bachelor brothers, Billy and John Blair, were readily recognizable: Billie with his brown pith helmet and mutton-chop whiskers, and John, noted for his frugality and thin frame. Frugal to the extent of trading his very old and unravelling sweater for one found in "like new shape!" Also, he thought his old sweater was much better suited on his neighbour's scare-crow which he had found to be "overdressed" as he strolled to Huallen.



Nick and Hilda Rotar's residence in the original Clow house 1944

When Nick and Hilda Rotar bought Clow's store in 1943, their first daughter, Doris, was just a toddler. As more children arrived, the log home behind was soon filled. The store was destroyed by fire in 1947. They rebuilt it larger. The log home was eventually replaced by an extension to the store, and the family grew to seven children. The Ole Haugli family with four children arrived in the early '50s. The "main street" to county road bus stop was crowded from the '50s through the '60s.

Unloading and warehousing the occasional boxcar of bagged fertilizer at uncle Mel Hart's elevator was a way to earn spending money for school. An annual carload of stoker coal for area furnaces (including at the store) brought farm trucks to the rail siding. From childhood when NAR steam trains stopped to take our cream cans to the Northern Alberta Dairy Pool, and the excitement of seeing the new diesel engines, Huallen was a pleasantly busy place to spend one's childhood.

Huallen Elevators in final Alberta Pool colours circa 1970

When the elevators were closed in 1972, there was little transportation business to draw people into the hamlet. The post office had devolved to roadside lockboxes in 1970, and, by 1974, the store was largely bypassed for town or city shopping, though Nick Rotar continued to live there until passing at nearly 104 years. The details and dates vary, but were played out across the prairies, and turned busy

social communities into bedroom communities or less. Now, online shopping is creating similar business attrition and a loss of face-to-face contact with neighbours.

As an all-too personal send-off, while waiting to take possession of a farmstead south of Beaverlodge in early 1974, we had our household effects stored in the unused hall. A heavy spring snowfall with rain and uneven loading from prior drifts brought down the roof. Decades of accumulated dust on the cardboard ceiling panels put a finishing touch to our Huallen send-off with the excavated effects.

There may be an encore performance for the address, as the railway has again become a catalyst for industrial activity at Huallen. Adjoining it to the east, a regional fracking sand facility is now in place with nearly a mile of siding for incoming sand cars, and b-train trucks haul regularly to distant well sites.

A mile to the west, Richardson International is constructing a 45,000 metric tonne storage facility and loop track by year's end. It will load out 150-car unit trains of grain on a continuous circuit track. To quote Tom Hamilton, Senior Vice-President, Agribusiness Operations, "The County of Grande Prairie is one of the most productive regions in Western Canada." It seems early settlers had found the right place after all.

But it is also true that most of the early residents I was close to, would not have traded their community of friends and neighbours with any modern version of today. Their distances travelled led to contemplation and resting the horses meant a valuable visit with a neighbour on the way. Dances and card parties were always a treat. It was a satisfying pace that allowed time to celebrate even small shared achievements.

Today, there are a few mid-20th century buildings left in historic Huallen, including Rotar's replacement of Clow's store (now a residence), and an elevator agent's residence. These are not visible from Alberta Highway #43 however, and the distinguishing landmark of the community is the earlier-day dairy farm's large concrete silo. Still, with no T&J Dairy Farm milk, and with Mayer's egg production facility across the tracks also long closed, the hamlet of Huallen lost key ingredients to justify an alias as the "Omelette" of Huallen.

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: Nelson and Clara Clow – Clow family collection
: Clow Store and Nick and Hilda Rotar – Rotar family collection
: Elevators – Jacobs family collection

The Mid-Canada Line
The South Peace Region's Other Radar System

Pat Wearmouth

*M*ost readers will be familiar with the Saskatoon Mountain Radar Base which was active from 1953 until 1988. It was part of a network of radar stations called the Pine Tree Line. But in the Saddle Hills to the north, there are remnants of another radar system. It was known as the Mid-Canada Line. Although relatively unknown now, why it was there and how it came to be, is an interesting story.

Background

During the 1950s and 60s, the United States and the Soviet Union, along with their respective allies, were engaged in a Cold War. It was an undeclared war, but both sides were worried that it might escalate into an armed conflict which would use nuclear weapons. At the time, the worry was considered very real. School children were put through drills on how to react to a nuclear attack. Air raid sirens were tested and bomb shelters were built.

To detect and defend against a Soviet threat, the U.S. and Canada agreed to build early warning radar systems that ran across Canada. Their purpose was to warn of attacks by Soviet bombers on southern Canadian and northern U.S. cities, industries, and military bases with fighter aircraft that could counter the threat.

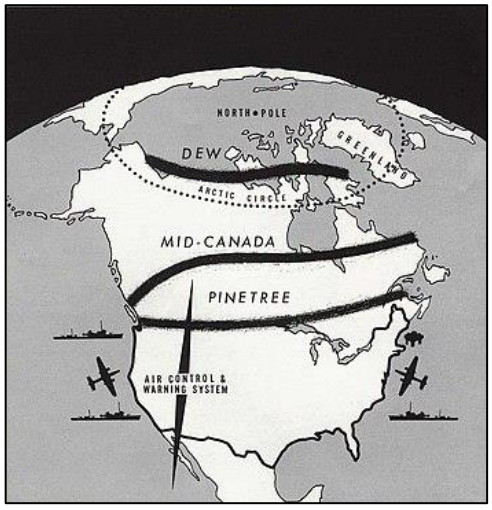

Fig 1. Rough Map of Radar Lines; Wiki map

Three lines were eventually built. They were in sequence from south to north, the Pine Tree Line, the Mid-Canada Line, and the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line (**Fig 1.**). It should be noted that the Pine Tree was not so much a line as a network of radar bases located in a band between the U.S border, and Saskatoon Mountain, one of the furthest north bases.

The reason for this sequence was to move detection capability ever closer to the Soviet bomber's launch points. Bombers were flying at increasing speeds as aircraft technology improved. Radar lines too far south could not detect bombers soon enough to warn of an attack before bombers reached their targets.

Building the Mid-Canada Line

The Mid Canada Line was built along the 55th parallel between Hopedale on the east coast of Labrador, and Dawson Creek, B.C. The map above indicates that the line extended all the way to the west coast, but this does not seem to have been the case. The line consisted of 90 remote, unmanned radar sites, and eight sites called Sector Control stations. Construction was carried out between 1954 and 1957. By 1957, the eastern half of the line had been completed. By January 1st, 1958, the western half was complete, and operations began. Unlike the other two lines which were jointly, funded and operated by the U.S. and Canada, the Mid Canada Line was entirely built and managed by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Civilian contractors were often employed, but overall it was an Air Force operation.

The line used a type of radar best described as an invisible fence. It was sometimes called the McGill Fence, because the early development work for the system was done at McGill University in Montreal. Radar beams transmitted from each site created a continuous fence along the entire line to a height of 65,000 feet. If an aircraft flew through it, the system acted like a tripwire. An alarm was set off and automatically transmitted to a Sector Control station where further action was taken. This type of radar could locate aircraft fairly accurately, but could not identify the type of aircraft. All that could be known was that something had flown through the fence at a particular spot. The Pine Tree Line radar system would then have to locate and identify the aircraft. Aircraft of all types were capable of tripping the alarms. In order to limit the unknown, commercial and private aircraft were required to file a flight plan if there was any chance they might go through the fence.

The 90 unmanned sites looked similar to one another. They included a mast which varied in height between 50 and 350 feet. On the mast were mounted radar transmitters, receivers, and antennas. The antennas were aimed so that the radar signal filled the space above the line. A microwave transmitter was also placed on the mast. This was used to send information from the radar site to the Sector Control station.

The radar sites were powered by diesel generators, one active, and two on standby. These were mounted on concrete foundations inside one end of a long building. At the other end there was accommodation for maintenance crews to use during their regular visits. In

between the two, spare parts and lubricants were stored. Other structures on sites included fuel tanks and outdoor privy.

The eight Sector Control stations were each somewhat unique. Some were self-contained because of their remoteness. Others were in small urban centres, and could depend on outside services to some extent.

The common elements of the stations were a hangar to house and maintain helicopters, a communication building, mess halls, barracks, and storage buildings. The stations employed a number of people including communication technicians, pilots, mechanics, cooks, and administration personnel. Staff on site could vary up to 150 people.

The communication building was the main focus of the station. Here the radar alarms were monitored and forwarded on to others and all the necessary communications with the wider world were handled.

Photo 1: Sikorsky H19 Helicopter, circa 1988 display at the Canadian Museum of Flight: Wikipedia

The most imposing building on site was the aircraft hangar. Helicopters, Sikorsky H19s (**Photo 1**), were used to service the unmanned sites if roads were unavailable. Supplies and maintenance crews were flown in on a regular basis to keep things operational. On the western half of the line, the RCAF owned the helicopters, but a contractor, Okanogan Helicopters, provided the pilots.

The South Peace Sites

Photo 2: Diesel Generator Foundations: PCHS photo

One of the unmanned radar sites was located in a forest clearing to the north of Valhalla. Another was located near the Saddle Hills forestry tower.
At the Valhalla site, there are some remnants still visible. The three concrete foundations for the diesel generators are there. (**Photo 2.**). The building that housed them, the supplies, and the maintenance

crew can be imagined but there is no trace of it. Also left standing is an upright concrete block which appears to be an anchor for one of the guy wires that supported the mast (**Photo 3**). Other evidence includes the privy hole, and several pieces of concrete that must have supported something. The site is gradually being covered in forest, as can be seen in the photos.

Photo 3: Guy Wire Anchor: PCHS photo

The Sector Control Station in Dawson Creek was responsible for 10 unmanned sites to the east, all of which were in Alberta. The station was situated where the Northern Lights College now sits, along Highway 2 across from a shopping mall. Many of the College buildings are actually the old station structures. The most obvious one is the aircraft hangar (**Photo 4**) which was used to house and maintain the helicopters that serviced the radar sites. It now acts as a classroom for aircraft maintenance training. The communications building is now the College administration office, and the barracks have become the student residences.

Photo 4: Refurbished Hanger in Dawson Creek: PCHS photo

Transport of supplies and maintenance crews to the radar sites from the station was either by helicopter or by road. A road was built into the Valhalla site, connecting it to the settlement area to the south. Helicopters may have delivered a light load like a maintenance crew, but heavier freight would have come by road. The helicopters would have been used to service some of the remoter sites further east along the line.

One last part of the maintenance process was procuring the supply of diesel fuel, oil, and lubricants. Fuel businesses in Dawson Creek and Sexsmith were designated as Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricant supply points. These were called POL sites.

End of the Line

As the RCAF completed the construction of the Mid Canada Line, military planners began to realize that there would have to be another line constructed even further to the north. The

construction of the DEW line along Canada's Arctic coast began in 1957, just as the Mid-Canada line became operational. Bomber speeds had continued to increase, but the real threat was beginning to be the warheads carried on Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles . These travelled at speeds far greater than bombers of any sort. Neither the Mid-Canada nor the Pine Tree Line could give adequate warning time for the missiles headed to targets.

Realizing this, the Mid-Canada Line was shut down in late 1964. It had operated seven years. The unmanned radar sites were dismantled and little if anything remains of them. The Sector Control stations were converted to some other use if it could be found. For example, stations became schools like the Northern Lights College, community buildings, and airports. They served civilian uses for many years.

The DEW line became the main early warning system for defense. With upgrades in the late 1980s, it became the North Warning System. Nowadays, satellites play a major role in the defense of North America, a far cry from the technology of the Mid-Canada Line. Each though, served in its time.

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- Site visit with Jim Yamkowy.
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St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada

Speed on the Snow and Ice

Ron Thoreson Remembers

In the days before the sensation of speed on a snowy winter-scape came from snowmobiles, there was always a search for the thrills that covered the full gamut of idle youths' imagination. That search was not always fulfilled, at least in the way that was expected.

By the mid to late nineteen fifties, the families in the hamlet of Huallen and the immediate area provided more than an adequate group for scrub hockey in our boots on main street, or on the frozen borrow pits that were created when the highway was upgraded and first paved. The ice was earned by hours of skating while pushing hand built wooden scrapers. As winter progressed, the available surface was reduced depending on the winter snowfall.

A bad initial surface freeze (as it always was) required an axe to cut holes, and five-gallon pails to distribute a fresh ice surface. The increasingly concave surface as winter progressed meant a banked perimeter, but there was still the threat of lost pucks in the deep snow banks as light faded. Slapshots were discouraged.

My other cousins had a pinto Welsh/Shetland pony. For winter diversion he became, with a tow rope, the locomotive force for toboggans and skis. The ditches between Huallen and the highway were always a challenge, since the snow drifts were typically at right angles to the county road. At a gallop, a toboggan faced what seemed to be a continuous series of violent speed bumps.

Even more challenging were the skis. They were hand fashioned in Norwegian fashion, but with little of the tapering thickness front and back combined with steam bending, although they had at least, a slight upturn at the front. Pioneer-style, there was no binding for a ski boot, just a provision for cinching a toe loop which served the purpose for our heavy winter boots.

Typically, when drifts had a gentle slope on one approach, there was a near-vertical face from the opposite direction. The skis would bury themselves in the wind packed drift, and the skier would do the same in the next drift, head-first. It was no mystery that these heavy hardwood skis proved unbreakable, but it was a miracle that there was never a broken bone among the participants, particularly when the towing graduated to an old pick-up.

When a cousin was licensed to drive, he was able to use his father's old post-war Chev pickup, purchased for upland bird and waterfowl hunts. Better speed than the pony too, which had developed a cranky attitude and occasionally bit!

The arrival of a prolonged Chinook glazed the county roads and generated the plan to take toboggans to a gravel pit south of Huallen. Downhill speed could be followed by uphill drives, thus replacing boring (and tiring) uphill walks.

Our group of four was three male cousins of three households, and the fourth, a Huallen neighbors' son. With winter coats, and all being between six feet and six foot five inches tall, it made a very cramped space in the cab of the Chev. It would normally be seen as full with two adults and a small child, having a floor mounted stick shift, and a cab barely wider than a Volkswagen.

The little truck was doing fine heading south for 4 miles, but when we turned west at the correction line, any visible base road or snow became a sheet of clear ice with a crowned centre line. After a twitch and a correction, we picked up some speed but without further warning, we swapped ends and slid into the ditch backwards. The grader's wing had left a line of willows in the ditch, and the truck hesitated then tipped onto the passenger door, and a bit more due to the slope.

No one was thrown about – there was no space that wasn't fully occupied. As years of accumulated dirt sifted about the cab, there was a quiet pause when everyone checked their situation. That changed quickly when someone said "This could catch fire!" The tangle of legs and the need to lift up and open the driver's door to exit, meant that the neighbor's son on the passenger door was liberally covered in large boot prints. The struggle to open and hold the driver's door led to several complaints. There was a distinct lack of teamwork.

Eventually everyone was able to clamber out, and the adrenaline spike led to massive fits of laughter among the group, as there was no injury except to the Chev. When righted later and retired, it had the upper cab shifted about 5 inches from original design. Surprisingly, though shifted, none of the windows were even broken. None of the toboggans were destroyed, but sixty years on, they (and the skis) seem to have gone missing. And sometimes I think, perhaps that's maybe a good thing.

Remembering Wayne Hart, Richard Thoreson, and Dennis Haugli