KEEPING HISTORY CURRENT

Upcoming Events

1. Peace Country Historical Society membership vote on proposed bylaw changes, January 11, 2021 at 1:30 pm in Muskoseepi Parking Lot across bridge from Grande Prairie Museum. **This still needs to be confirmed in light of the current meeting rules around CoVid-19.**

2. A virtual presentation on the history of the Air Cadets in the area will be aired on YouTube soon. A notification will be sent out when this is ready. This will be our first attempt at virtual, an event not to be missed.

Next Scheduled newsletter Volume 11 issue 1 – March

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President's Message

Hello;

On behalf of your Board of Directors, I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas, and best wishes for the New Year. This year's holiday season is certainly different, but we hope you are able to find ways to enjoy it.

Hopefully you received the notice that the Board of Directors would like to change our Society's bylaws to allow for using electronic means to hold meetings. At least until we are able to gather again in person. Currently, the membership vote on the change is planned to be held on January 11th at 1:30pm in the GP Museum parking lot across from the main entrance. This has yet to be confirmed; stay tuned.

And speaking of using electronics, Duff Crerar is still working diligently on a video presentation which can be watched at home. The subject matter is the history of the Air Cadets in Grande Prairie. The event will be well publicized so watch for this as well.

This edition of the Newsletter includes a set of stories with some small connection to Christmas. There are articles about an early settler family, an Anglican Minister's story, and another on the history of coal mining in the South Peace. And as usual, some historical trivia and a Christmas recipe from days gone by.

And to end, the PCHS would like to congratulate the Sexsmith Museum Society on their obtaining a Municipal Historic Resource designation for their Alberta Wheat Pool Elevator

As always, enjoy. Pat Wearmouth,

Canadian Food Inventions:

- Butter Tarts - *Barrie 1900*
- Nanaimo Bars - *Nanaimo 1952*
- Poutine - *Montreal late 1950's*
- Hawkins Cheezies - *Belleville 1949*
- Ginger Ale - *Toronto 1907*
- Canola Oil - *Sask. / Manitoba 1960's*
- Pablum - *Toronto 1930*
- Instant Mashed Potatoes - *Ottawa 1962*
- Yukon Gold Potatoes - *Guelph 1960's*
- Peanut Butter - *Montreal 1884*
- California Rolls - *Vancouver 1971*
- Cuban Lunch - *Winnipeg 1948*
- The Caesar Drink - *Calgary 1969*
- Beaver Tails - *Ottawa 1978*
- Maple Syrup - *Quebec Pre 17 - 1800's*
- Hawaiian Pizza - *Chatham 1962*
- Ginger Beef - *Calgary 1975*
- Chewing Gum - *Toronto 1860's*

REV. WOLF OF THE PEACE

Duff Crerar, GPRC Emeritus - *Duff Crerar is a retired historian and author, who has lived in Grande Prairie sine 1990. He is the author of **Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War (2014), and other articles.***

His name was George Hedley Wolfendale, better known to his friend Monica Storrs as "Brother Wolf". During the Depression this slight, unassuming, friendly but physically tough survivor came to serve God and the settlers around Fort St. John. Like many who came into or left the Peace, after many years he would move on to other fields, though no one could have predicted that his life would end serving Canadian soldiers in Italy.

Like many Anglican clergy, he was a son of the manse, born in 1899, and quickly swept up into the Great War as a volunteer in the British Army. Though wounded, he survived and, like many Great War veterans looked for adventure. In Canada he learned the basic construction skills of the lumber camps he worked in, then went for clerical training at the Montreal Diocesan College.

Ordained in 1931, he was stationed in the Peace Country by an Anglican association known as the Fellowship of the West, a group of lay-folk who raised money (a tricky business in the Depression) by free-will offerings. Supported by this sometimes-shoestring budget, Wolfendale arrived in Fort St. John acquired a horse eventually arrange for a well-used saloon car. Fort St. John had no Anglican church, and if there was going to be one, he would have to build it. Here he also met his benefactor, chief co-worker occasional thorn-in-the-side Miss Monica Storrs, "God's Galloping Girl" of the Peace.[i]

Monica Storrs was another of the patriotic Anglican type well-known to missionary history. Independent, outspoken, single, Indefatigable, adventurous, able to ride for miles on sometimes skittish horses in any weather, and never intimidated by men who tried to tell her what to do, Monica Storrs became a Peace Country legend in the Depression years. One of the leaders of the women's association known as the Companions of the Peace, she forged a link between English and Canadian Anglicans and the often isolated and sometimes struggling Peace Country settlers. If Wolf (as she called him) was the clerical link to God, Storrs was the link to the women, children and indirectly the laymen of the Peace, as she founded Girl Guide troops and Sunday schools, organized women's auxiliaries, passed the news of needy families to medical and municipal officials, and methodically criss-crossed the area linking settlers and settlements together.

There is a fair bit of tongue-clucking and eye-rolling implied in the references to "brother Wolf" in the Storrs letters and diaries. Some of it probably came from the knowledge (unknown to Wolfendale) that half his stipend came out of her own allowance. Her picture of Wolfendale probably should be taken with a bit of salt. There, he is portrayed as late for meetings and a bit disorganized, easily distracted from the key objective of one project or another, and sometimes a hazard to travel with on the dangerous trips he launched with his car. Crossing the Peace to get someone to Dawson Creek could be dangerous, as currents and unpredictable thaws led to treacherous ice conditions. Wolfendale struggled with keeping the saloon in good repair, which

gave Storrs some exciting and sometimes exasperating rides, punctuated by bouts of pushing, jacking up and almost carrying the jalopy to the other side. According to Storrs, Wolfendale's horse was built more for pulling a wagon than wearing a saddle.

On the other hand, Storrs realized that Wolfendale was a victim of his own willingness to turn aside for the needs of others. He was late because he had answered a call for a ride, or someone needed help in some other way. He was time-improvident, but always cheerful and helpful, which won friends over the years. He was willing to walk from Fort St. John to Hudson's Hope to bring worship and the sacraments. Storrs noted how patient he was in conducting parish business and working with people from different origins and denominations. And Wolfendale could build. Miss Storrs was determined, as was Wolfendale, to get an Anglican church built in Fort St. John, so he and one or two others were soon at work.

Their lumber camp background shows in the final product, St. Martin's. The wood frame church had the long, rectangular bunkhouse frame, with an improvised square turret. And it was rugged: the church lasted many years, before being moved, and another built in its place. Sadly, the original St. Martin's, Wolfendale's sanctuary, later was destroyed by fire.

St. Martin's in the Field completed (P7531-100). Courtesy of General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada.

Storrs was both surprised and somewhat anxious when Wolfendale went back East in 1932, acquired a wife, and returned with her to the field. Her patronizing tone about Mrs. Wolfendale

reflects some of her own spinster toughness.[ii] She also realized that married clergy would soon have family, and that someday the Wolfendales would move to a more settled parish that could afford them. When that day came, the Fort St. John flock and many others gave him a warm send- off.

Settled in Eastern Ontario parishes, the Wolfendales raised two children. But the Second World War intervened. Leaving his family in Golden Lake, Ontario, he volunteered as a private (there were not enough chaplaincies available right away) and ended up with medical and engineering units of the Canadian Army in England. Though a Corporal, he assisted the chaplains, and, when a German air raid in April 1941, demolished All Saints Anglican Church, hospitalizing the curate and killing several members, he received permission from both the Canadian Army and the Church of England to take over the parish, even persuading the Chief Engineer of First Canadian Corps to have some of his men salvage the ruins and build a new church. Starting in March 1943, the job was done in just five weeks.[iii]

Negative IDX-9154. Canadian Engineers at work on All Saints Reconstruction, Spring, 1943.
https://www.mgtmchurches.org.uk/frontpage/allsaints/information-3-2-2/nggallery/image/1dx_9154/

A Canadian Army Newsreel shows the long line of ecclesiastic, Canadian Army and local officials marching into "Canada Hall" on Easter Day, 1943, for the consecration by the Bishop of Southwark.[iv]

Meanwhile, Wolfendale's abilities had been recognized, and the Canadian Engineers were being reorganized for deployment. They needed a chaplain. Building bridges, clearing minefields and demolitions, the Engineers were often under fire in Italy. They defused bombs, improved roads and took on a host of other construction jobs, besides maintaining and repairing transport and armoured units. During the fight to break the Hitler Line in May 1944, German mortars and thick minefields were deadly both for the soldiers and chaplains. It was one of these which left Wolfendale, helping with the wounded, seriously wounded out in the open.[v] It was a bad day for the engineers, and he was left behind. It was the Germans who mopped up. Their medical staff found Wolfendale and treated him, a prisoner of war, in their aid station. Though the medics did what they could he died there on 11 June 1944. Today he lies in the Bologna War Cemetery, his headstone inscribed "Faithful unto Death". After the war he was posthumously made a member of the Order of the British Empire, a distinction judged suitable for non-combatant chaplains who put their lives in danger.[vi]

The Bologna military cemetery is a place of quiet and calm, though now the faint noise of traffic can be heard. One can sit on the wooden benches and contemplate the rows of headstones where British and Canadian soldiers lie. It seems so far away from the forests, fields, the heat, insects, deer, moose and especially the ferocious cold of the Peace. But, if one can trace a single line which binds together all the chapters of Brother Wolf's life, it would be his persistent effort to establish, or mend peoples' lives, and build their places of worship. Taking the walking tour of Watson Lake today, visitors to St. John the Baptist Anglican Church will find the church was a gift of the Canadian Armed Forces, in Wolfendale's memory. It was a fitting tribute to one of the builders of the Peace.

[1] W. L. Morton, ed. **God's Galloping Girl: The Peace River Diaries of Monica Storrs, 1929-1931**. Vancouver: UBC Press, reprint, 1979, passim; also Monica Storrs, **Companions of the Peace: The Diaries and Letters of Monica Storrs, 1931-1939**. Edited by Vera K. Fast. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, passim.

[1] **Companions**, p. 87, also p. 10-11,23.

[1] Canadian Engineers at work on All Saints Reconstruction, Spring, 1943.l See also http://www.merstham.co.uk/merstham/Canadahall.htm. See also "Little Chapel will Replace Blitzed Church", Canadian War Museum newspaper Clippings Collection, 5086_851_135-001-010.

[1] Canadian Army Newsreel #10 part 3 "Sappers Rebuild Blitzed Church". A few years after the war, the church was rebuilt, and the Canadian-built chapel became "Canada Hall".

[1] Wolfendale was posted as missing in action for a few days, **Ottawa Journal**, 26 June 1955, p.5.During that summer the chaplain to the Royal Canadian Regiment died of wounds from a minefield.

[1] Commonwealth War Graves Commission Records, Bologna War Cemetery, lii, Grave 3C5. Supplement to the **London Gazette,** 1 February 1945, p. 677. *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 28 February 1945. See Also http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/collections/virtualmem/photos/1717193, and WO 373/72/554.See also Watson Lake Historical Society, **Watson Lake Walking Tour**, Yukon Government, 3rd

"It was Christmas, but we didn't know it:

The Carveths move West"

By Charles Taws

All pictures courtesy of the South Peace Regional Archives

Cecil and Rupert Carveth (formerly of Clarke Township) had just spent a cold and arduous week on Northern Alberta's storied Edson Trail. When they got back to their log cabin in the wide open and vast Grande Prairie region, they were tired and hungry. They knew it was December, but it wasn't until a week later when they went to the small nearby settlement of Grande Prairie that they found out they had reached home on Christmas Day.

The Carveths came from Clarke Township in Ontario. Originally the family hailed from Cornwall, England and first settled in the Peterborough and Port Hope areas of Ontario. It was in the latter place that Rupert and Cecil's father Arthur W. Carveth was born. In 1911 when the above Christmas incident took place A.W Carveth had sold his prosperous mills in villages of Orono, Newcastle and Leskard to take part in the last great land rush in Canadian History.

"The Last Best West" they called it, the Peace River Country of Northern Alberta, that huge swath of open fertile prairie surrounded by muskeg was just waiting to be settled and farmed. It was the last place a settler could get free land, but before the railway came in 1916 it was very hard to get to. Only two wilderness trails gave access to the region: The Edson and the Athabasca Trails. It was the shorter Edson Trail that Arthur Carveth had decided would take him and his family to Canada's last great land rush!

Rupert Carveth was already in Saskatchewan helping friends homestead when he got an unexpected letter from his father telling him that the family mills were sold; they were moving to the Peace River Country and he was to meet him at Edson, Alberta. Edson was the end of the rail line and Arthur arrived with a train carload of settler's effects to find that the Edson Trail was not yet completed. They could get through on horses but not with wagons. Their effects had to be stored and it took them 10 days riding and walking to get their first glimpse of what the early Oblate Missionaries called "Le Grande Prairie". Rupert remembered his Dad walked the entire way, "I'm too old to start riding now" Arthur said.

One of the most difficult things about taking the trails to Grande Prairie was crossing the rivers. For this reason, many settlers chose wintertime to travel, when all was solid and frozen. The fact that the temperature was below minus 40 was a small price to pay as they easily glided over the snow and ice, but, Arthur and Rupert came up in early summer. While crossing the wide Big Smoky River, Arthur was in a small rowboat leading a horse with a rope. An oarlock broke, the horse overtook the boat and nearly capsized it. In the confusion Arthur lost both oars and his hat. Arthur had to hand paddle himself to shore, landing considerably further downstream than he wanted, but luckily both man and beast survived. The loss of his hat depressed him as he knew it would add to his discomforts. Lucky for him, another Grande Prairie settler, Mrs. Benson, saw his plight and gave him her wide brimmed straw hat to protect him from the sun.

He was still wearing Mrs. Benson's hat weeks later when a photograph was snapped on the first day the Grande Prairie Land Registry Office opened on July 15th 1911. Arthur and Rupert were no. 2 and no. 3 in line, and both got their first pick for a homestead. They had had the luxury of arriving some weeks early so they could scout the land and pick two choice quarter sections.

Towards the end of August Arthur and Rupert went back to Edson to meet the eldest Carveth sibling, Cecil. This was a chance to bring up the settler's effects they had earlier left in Edson. Cecil remembered the arduous trip well. They left Edson with two wagons and five horses. The Trail was so muddy they lost two horses in the mire and both wagons had to be left on the trail, contents intact, for later retrieval.

With Cecil's help they built their first log cabin, complete with a sod roof. Although they had left all their tools on the Trail, the generosity of their neighbours allowed them to complete the project. Once they had a place to stay both Rupert and Cecil began construction of a barn. Like the cabin, it was built of logs and had a roof of logs, straw and sod. They used mud and manure to chink the cracks. They had two favoured horses left from Ontario, Bill and Tom, but when Bill died, they made stable door hinges from his hide.

By early December, with the rivers and streams frozen they decided to go down to Edson again. Cecil and Rupert to transport more settlers' effects being stored there and to pick up the wagons they had left on the trail. Arthur would take the train east and fetch the rest of the family from Orono. It was on Cecil's and Rupert's return that the Christmas episode mentioned at the beginning of the article happened.

Rupert and Cecil had a younger brother named Gerald who would become one of Grande Prairie's most active civic leaders and his introduction to his new home was a bit different from that of his older brothers. Gerald remembers, their house in Orono was in an uproar. Things were being crated, others sold and numerous pamphlets and brochures extolling the virtues of the Peace Country Region were everywhere. It was the type of commotion that heralded adventure and Gerald was delighted to be moving. He had been a boy scout and was eager to put all his training to good use.

By February 1st 1912 the Carveth clan were again in Edson. This time, with Arthur's sister, Dr. Annie Higbee, her husband Charles and son Jack, not to mention Mrs. Carveth (Bessie), their daughter Rita and, of course Gerald. All were preparing for the final trek to their new home. Gerald was in high spirits; he had convinced his Dad to let him travel the 200 km trip from Edmonton to Edson in the boxcar with their luggage rather than the boring regular passenger car. His excitement rose higher when he learned that he was to lead one of the sleighs with a team of oxen. Arthur would take the lead with Bessie in the caboose (a kind of gypsy cart used for cooking and sleeping). Next his brother-in-law, Prof. Charles Higbee with Annie in a sleigh full of freight. Then Gerald with a team of oxen pulling a sled of provisions. Rupert was behind him driving a team of horses, then five cows and finally a light cutter where Rita Carveth and her cousin Jack Higbee took turns at the reins. While an exciting time for a boy it had its dangerous times too. Going down a steep riverbank Gerald failed to get his team to stop sliding down the hill despite having three brakes out. Charles Higbee's team was in his way. Oxen don't move very fast, but Charles got his team to the side just as Gerald went sliding past and thankfully no broken legs or upsets happened.

When Gerald became old enough to file for a homestead, he waited 40 days at the Land Registry office to secure his land. He almost missed all the stooking for the bumper crop of 1915. It wasn't long before father and sons became community leaders. They lead in civic duty, sports, education and preserving local history. Gerald was a long-time member of both the Grande Prairie Museum Board and the Old-Timer's Association.

Gerald stayed in Grande Prairie where he is still well remembered. Cecil moved back to Newcastle where he was also active in local government. He was the one that gave the Carveth films to Jack Gordon thereby ensuring their preservation. Interested in history like his brother, He took part in the unveiling of Newcastle's Joseph Atkinson Plaque in 1973. Rupert stayed in Grande Prairie, local baseball star and farmer. He married later in life and, like his mother and father, retired to Victoria B.C.

The Carveth's, an industrious Ontario Family, helped create the vibrant Western Canada of today. Even, Arthur's sister Dr. Annie Higbee, would become almost legendary for her contribution to Alberta's Peace Region. It was a difficult time for Cecil and Rupert, when they missed Christmas in 1911. Our Christmas is difficult in a different way, but like them, if we persevere and do the best we can, we will succeed. Merry Christmas everybody.

Carveth Article Photo Captions

1. **Carveth Homestead, 1912**
   The Carveths settled east of Grande Prairie. This is Arthur's original homestead. You can imagine the comforts he left behind in Orono in search of a new adventure.

2. **Carveth Homestead, c. 1915**
   In a few years Arthur replaced the log cabin with this fine new home. You can just glimpse some of the original log buildings in the back.

3. **Opening of the Dominion Land Office in Grande Prairie**
On July 15th 1911 settlers could register for their free land in the Peace Region of Alberta. This was the last time free land would be made available to settlers. Arthur Carveth can be seen in the bottom left corner, behind the front row, in the white shirt and white hat. The hat had originally belonged to Mrs. Benson.

4. **Out for a Sunday ride in a Democrat**
Front row (right to left): Wylie Sawyer, Rita Carveth, Boody Sprague. Rupert and Gerald are in the back, the other man is unidentified. Wylie, Boody and Rupert played baseball together on both the Grande Prairie and Deep Creek teams.

5. **Rupert Carveth Plowing with a Team of Six c.1920**
Rupert working on the Homestead east of Grande Prairie.

Please credit all photos to "Courtesy of the South Peace Regional Archives"

Attached is a story I wrote about the Carveths. They are a family that from the same part of Ontario that I am from who homesteaded to Grande Prairie in 1911. The father, Arthur W. Carveth, was Dr. Annie Higbee's brother. Attached is the story with photos. I hope you can use it.
Thanks

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Christmas Coal
Coal Mines in the South Peace
Pat Wearmouth

It is winter time in the South Peace, and people have moved indoors to stay warm. The heating fuels that provided this warmth have varied over the years. Natural gas is largely the norm now, but in the first half of the last century, wood and coal were really the only fuels accessible. Wood predominated as it was found most everywhere. But for some areas, close enough to a mine, coal had its place.

Winter is also the season when we celebrate Christmas. There were, and perhaps still are, connections between coal and Christmas. Readers might remember as a child, the warmth of the house on Christmas Eve from the coal in the stove or furnace. The warmth was nice, but it begged the question, how was Santa going to get down the chimney without being burned. Parents came up with some pretty amazing stories to settle that fear. If Christmas holidays included the building of a snowman, the song lyrics "and two eyes made out of coal" would apply. And then the really big question; did Santa think I had been naughty or nice over the past year? Would there be a present in the Christmas stocking, or simply a lump of coal? Hopefully the former was always the case.

Coal Formation

Coal is rock that burns. In the South Peace region, it was formed between 80 million and 66 million years ago. Plant material which grew in wet swampy areas, died and decayed into peat. The peat was then buried under increasing layers of sediment. The pressure and the heat caused by this burial slowly, very slowly, turned the peat into coal. The longer this process, the better the grade of coal that resulted.

South Peace coal is graded as sub-bituminous, and is known as a thermal or heating coal. One variation does occur at the west end of the region. Mines in the vicinity of the Red Willow River produced coal known locally as "hot coal". It was sub-bituminous, but contained substances known as high volatiles which are very flammable. A fire from this coal was prone to flare up and produce more heat than expected. If care was not taken with the amount of coal used and the stove draft control, the fire would become hot enough to warp stoves and grates, and to create chimney fires.

Markets for Coal

Coal makes good heating fuel compared to wood, making a more stable fire that can burn 10 to 12 hours before needing tending. Among other things, this meant that someone did not have to get up in the middle of a cold night to add wood to a fire. And in the morning, the remains of the coal fire still retained enough heat to start the fire anew.

Compared to wood, coal was a much easier option for providing heat. Firewood might be available, but it required felling, bucking, and splitting, all done by hand before the advent of powered saws. It also took time to dry properly and took up a lot of storage space. Coal came ready to burn. When supply ran low, it took only a day or two to obtain another load that was ready to use. As well, coal took up relatively little space to store; so many weeks' worth of heat could be stored in the cellar.

The markets for South Peace coal were varied. A first and continuing demand came from local farm residents who could haul the coal for themselves. Besides heating, one other use on farms was as a supplement to pig feed. Coal slack, a mix of small coal lumps and coal dust, was used to deworm the animals, and perhaps provide some minerals to the diet. References to this practice also noted that the pigs seemed to enjoy the coal experience and its satisfying crunch. Another interesting market was the use of coal dust in cemeteries. Grave diggers would scatter coal dust on the site to capture the heat of the sun and help thaw the soil before digging began.

As communities grew, urban residences, commercial businesses, and industrial buildings began to demand coal. In Grande Prairie, coal was used to heat houses, churches, the Dairy Pool, the hospital, various schools, and the D Company Armory. Smaller communities used the fuel in the same manner. A later addition to the market was stoker coal. This was coal that had been screened to produce smaller lumps that could mechanically feed into a firebox, thus reducing the labor required. Stoker coal was hauled as far as Dawson Creek markets.
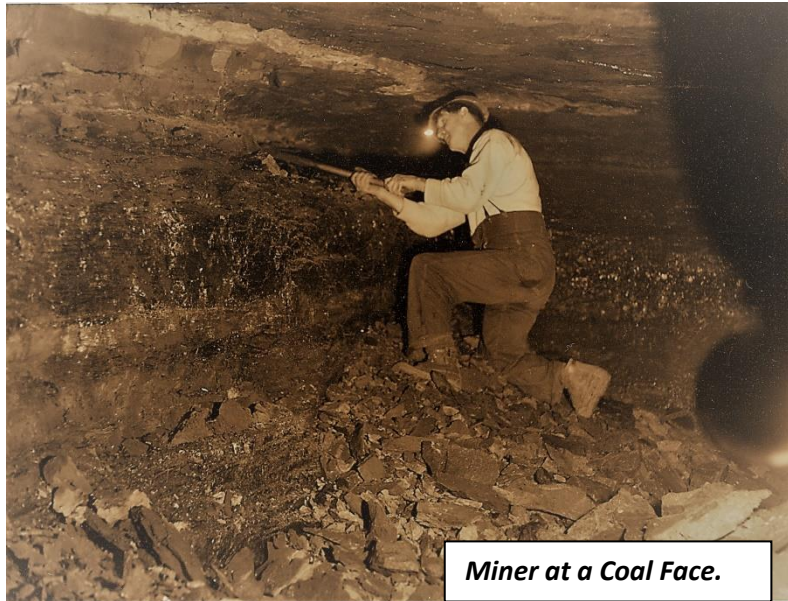
Coal Mining

Coal mining in the South Peace began in an extensive way shortly after the 1910 rush of agricultural settlement. The Alberta Energy Regulator's records show that mining permits were issued here as early as 1916. The permit granted a lease for a particular area, and the right to mine the coal that was under that area. The mine was charged a royalty on the coal produced, and at one time was reported to be about 10 cents per ton. In succeeding years mines were established across the region. Permits were issued for locations from Pinto Creek south of the Wapiti to White Mountain just south of Spirit River; and from the Simonette River in the east to the Red Willow in the west.

The mines used one of two methods to produce coal, either underground or strip mining. Both began by finding a coal seam, usually where it had been exposed along a river or creek bank in the region. For example, on the Wapiti River south and east of Dimsdale, coal was seen along a two mile front on the north bank of the river, and up Spring Creek, a tributary to the river.

To start an underground mine, a tunnel would be dug with pick and shovel into the bank to hit the seam and then follow it along. The tunnel was cribbed with timber to prevent cave-ins and to allow a miner to walk upright. But often, over the course of a winter, the weight from above would leave the tunnels little more than four feet high. Ian Macalister, a local farmer and miner

recalled in a 1962 interview, that miners were either lying in the mud (mines were always wet), or rubbing their backs against the wet ceiling. "Clothing was always a terrible mess."

Miners continued with the pick to break coal lumps out of the seam. Depending on the space to swing the pick, miners would stand, crouch, or lie on their sides to do this with the appropriate length of pick handle. They did this in those wet conditions mentioned, and in the dark except for the light of their open flame, carbide lamp mounted on their miner's cap. One of the signs of an experienced miner was that he could hook his lamp onto his cap without looking. Novice miners took note.

Miner at a Coal Face.

As with any manual labour of the day (e.g. axe work, pitching bundles, piling lumber), the miners developed techniques for using a pick that lessened the need for brute force. That force could be applied when needed, but conserving strength with technique was a better way to make it until the end of the shift. Two tons of coal per day ready to haul is mentioned as being a productive shift. For this, at least in the 1930s, the miner was paid $1.50 per day plus his board. Miners and sometimes families often stayed at the mine site for part of the winter, and there was usually a cookhouse.
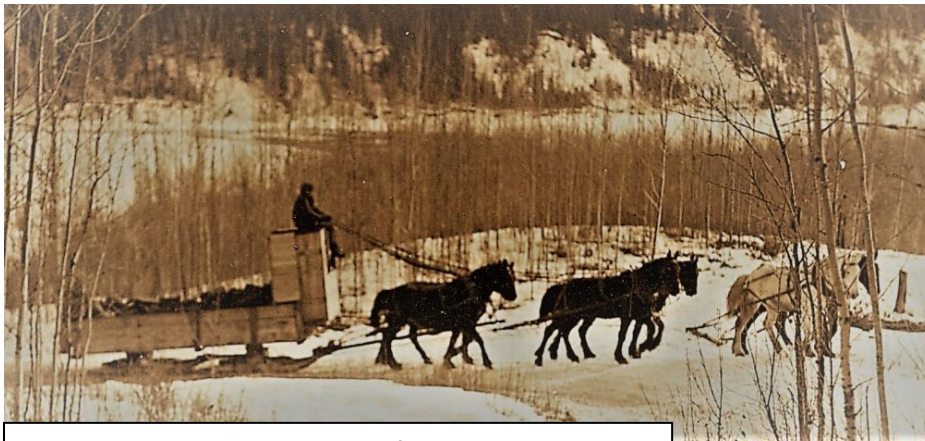
The coal lumps from the seam were shoveled into a coal cart and pushed by hand along wooden or steel rails to the mine entrance. The carts were built with sloping ends and their four wheels were spaced closely together near the center of the cart so that a heavy load could be tipped easily and dumped into a pile for load out. From this pile, coal could be bought for around the $8.00 per ton.

A mine entrance in 1936. Note the coal pile ready for loading and the light on the miner's canvas cap.

Coal was loaded into sleighs, or later trucks, which would haul the coal to its destination. There were various means of loading. The coal could simply be shoveled into the haul vehicle by the "Armstrong" method. Since most underground mines were up the bank of a valley, it was sometimes possible to build a sloped chute out over the valley floor. The hauler

would pull up underneath the chute and gravity did the rest. At other mines, loaded carts were pulled on rails up to the top of the bank to level ground. The hauler would drive into a natural or dug depression which was lower than the coal pile. Again gravity helped.

A six horse team coming out of the Wapiti valley. The driver is sitting on top of his shelter.

Coal loads ranged between from two to five tons. Four or six horse teams and good teamster skills were required to pull the loads out of the valleys. Wes Stephens, a farmer in the Dimsdale area was noted by his peers for his ability to get a six horse team and his coal sleigh up the Wapiti hill and on his way to customers in Grande Prairie. Haulers made between $2.50 and $5.00 per trip, after expenses.

The other method of mining was referred to as strip mining. First the soil and rock overburden above the coal seam were stripped away. In early years this was done using a plow and scraper (a Fresno), and later, a bulldozer. The spoil as it was called, would then be piled out of the way.

Once the seam was exposed from the top, holes were drilled into the coal, and black powder, and later, dynamite, charges were used to **fr**acture the coal. The drilling of these holes was all done by hand for many years. At one point, Scotty Ray and Laurence Cage who strip mined in the Redwillow area attempted to mechanize the process. After much thought and metal working, they managed to attach the bit from their hand drill to an old Wisconsin gas motor. Feeling very proud of this new tool, they started the engine, only to realize that the engine turned in the opposite direction of the hand drill. The bit would not bite into the coal. As no other bits were to be found, they carried on drilling by hand.

During the transition to dynamite, miners learned about the difference in explosive energy between the two. Using the same amount of dynamite as powder resulted in the coal being blown to dust rather than to lumps. Not much to sell when this occurred.

Again, a pick was used as the extraction tool. This time using it to lift the coal lumps out of the coal bed. The lumps could then be piled for loading in ways similar to that of underground mines.

The South Peace mines as a whole, did not suffer many serious accidents over the years. As the industry grew, miners were required to have safety training and to carry a miner's card at the coal face to prove it. Foreman and mine owners would have had additional training. Annual

inspections of the mines were made by the government to check on this training and the safety of the working environment.

As mines grew deeper and tunnels longer, owners had to be mindful of this environment. Water was a constant issue, as was a concern for air quality. Water pumps and ventilation fans were installed to improve conditions. Air shafts which could also serve as escape routes, were again, dug by hand. At least two of the mines in the Spring Creek/Wapiti area required shafts of greater than 80 feet in depth. The miners dug through clay gumbo, blasted rock out, and cribbed the shafts, all the while working in a 5 foot by 5 foot space.

Local Mines

As mentioned, coal mines were scattered across the South Peace. But three areas stand out for their concentration of coal seams and subsequent mines. These are, from east to west, the Bad Heart Area, the Spring Creek area, and the Redwillow area.
The stories of the mines and the people involved in them are found in the local history books referenced at the end of this article. For those interested, these books can be found in a local library, the Grande Prairie library's Isabel Campbell room, or the South Peace Regional Archives.

The Bad Heart area – Township 75 – Range 3 –W6thM.

The mines in the Bad Heart area were situated along an unnamed creek that flows into the Bad Heart River from the southwest. They were just over a mile west and a bit south of the junction of Highway733 and Township Road 752. There were four mining permits issued in the area between the years 1923 and 1941. The mines are recorded as having produced about 2,200 tons of coal. The names associated with the mines included Len Beard, John and Emil Arac, Russell and Williams, and Anton Anderson and his sons Henry and George.

As with all three local areas, the development of the mines through time is a bit confusing. There are no permits shown under the Anderson name, but there is mention of Beard selling his mine to Anton. He had been a miner in his native Sweden. It is known that Anton, George and Henry worked in a mine for some years. That one may have been the most familiar mine to those who still remember, the Teepee Creek Mine. It ran from 1937 until 1941. The mine was an underground one. It produced over 1,100 tons of coal over its life. An additional 1,100 tons came from Arac's stip mine, making up the total tonnage for the area.

The coal from Bad Heart was marketed to local settlers who hauled it for themselves. More distant markets included Teepee Creek, Webster, and Sexsmith. There are old trails in the vicinity off the mines, but they are not well defined. The most logical route to haul the coal to settlements south or west would have been to travel south to connect with is what now Township Road 744, the Webster Road. Coal was hauled with horse and sleigh in the early years, and then with the trucks.

The Spring Creek/Wapiti River area – Township 70-Range 7-W6thM

The Spring Creek/Wapiti River area, south and east of Dimsdale had 16 permitted coal mines over the years. Permits were issued starting in 1916, and the last mine was closed in 1956. During that period, approximately 35,000 tons of coal was produced, making this by far the largest producing area in the South Peace. This was no doubt due to the combination of coal availability, the technology used, and the market demand from nearby Grande Prairie. Two of the mines were strip mines. The others were all underground.

There were a large number of names associated with mining in this area. An incomplete list would include T. Russell, the Aseltine Bros., W. Loskill, N. Schneider, F. Maus, H. Campbell, O. Augustine, H, Sinclair, the Mitchell Bros., Tissington, and Cumbers and Baldwin.

Hauling coal to market also employed many teamsters, local farmers and their teams. Some of the names from this part of the business, again, and incomplete list, were S. Sutherland, R. Campbell, and H. Sinclair.

Like the Bad Heart area, it is not altogether clear how mining in this area developed through the years. Mines were often sold on to another operator and the same mine might then acquire a new name. The four biggest mines, which produced 29,000 of the 35,000 tons noted, were permitted to Loskill and Schneider, the Mitchell Bros., Baldwin Collieries, and H. Campbell. Again, miners like Loskill and Schneider arrived here with mining skills learned in their native land, Germany in this case. They had come to the region for land, but they, and their neighbors, needed funds to develop it. Coal mining or hauling was a way to earn wages for the expenditures. Many people did both over the course of a season. The Loskill/Schneider mine for instance, at one time had six or more double shifts going, and a number of haulers keeping the coal moving to market.

The Red Willow area – Township 70-Ranges 10 & 11-W6thM

The Red Willow area had 28 permits issued for mining between 1916 and 1955. Out of these, 16 producing mines were developed, nine strip and seven underground mines. Together they produced a total of about 14,000 tons of coal during those years.

 The mines were found both upstream and downstream of the Halcourt bridge over the Red Willow River. The downstream ones were close to the junction of the Red Willow and Beaverlodge rivers. The upstream ones were around the first and second bends to the west of the bridge.

Again, there were a large number of names associated with mining in this area. The incomplete list would include Dunbar, Fraser, Scorgie, Ray, Dahl, Cage, Schanuel, Romanuik, Turner, and Hamilton. Included in the list were several people of Scottish decent who had been miners in Scotland before coming into the South Peace. As with all

three areas, that previous experience was a real help in starting the industry in the locale.

The mining techniques here were similar to those already discussed. The coal haul to the Grande Prairie market though, was longer. A story told by Lawrence Lock, an area farmer and miner includes some of the details.

Lawrence at one time made two trips per week hauling coal from the Red Willow mines to Grande Prairie with horses and sleigh. When he arrived he was obliged to pay the livery charges for feed and a stall, meals, and perhaps a room for himself. This left him about $5.00 from his two ton load. Lawrence was courting a local girl at the time, and it took him all winter to save enough to buy her an engagement ring. "Thank God she said yes."

For most users, the coal burning period in the South Peace ended in the mid-1950s. Natural gas entered the region, and the coal mines shut down. Coal had had a run of 40 years, more or less. Coal contributed to the comfort of homes, the heating of commercial and community buildings, and the processes of industry. It also supported many families and businesses through good times and bad in those years.

There is not much left to see of the mines themselves. Most of the entrance tunnels for underground mines have collapsed or been covered over by slumping river and creek banks. Strip mine sites are a bit more obvious, but vegetation growth is slowly obscuring them. A few wooden buildings still can be found. Perhaps the best indication of the mine sites are the roads and trails that led to them, still faintly discernable. They are a great place to let the mind wander and consider the loads of coal produced and then hauled over them.

Merry Christmas.

References:

Photos from the South Peace Regional Archives collection.
Wagon Trails Grown Over – the Bad Heart area.
Along the Wapiti – the Spring Creek/Wapiti River area
Beaverlodge to the Rockies – the Red Willow area
Thanks to Earnest Burgess, Stan and Rita Sparks, Lawrence McAlister, Ross Sutherland, Jim Gingles, Cathy Dalgleish, Travis Hauger, Ken Lock, and Eldon and Alvin Cage for additional information.

Keeping History Current

A few thoughts on why to join PCHS

Just a bit of interesting PCHS history for anyone:
- 2008   A Heritage Symposium held at GPRC and the idea of forming a new chapter of the Historical Society of Alberta was conceived.
- At a meeting held in December the idea was approved and, under the guidance of Campbell Ross, a steering committee was formed to draw up Goals, a Mission statement, & Bylaws.
- 2009   The Peace Country Historical Society, following a membership drive and consultation with the proper authorities on bylaws, became a legally recognized society and an official branch of the Historical Society of Alberta.

Chapters provide regular newsletters, informing of programs, meetings, upcoming events, regional history stories, reviewing past events, and sharing local heritage issues.

Chapters are also mandated to publish or sponsor publications relating to the local or provincial history.

Members are invited to serve on boards and committees. The more members the wider the variety of projects able to be undertaken at the local and regional level.

Membership Privileges-

As a member of the Peace Country Historical Society (the newest and fifth chapter of the Historical Society of Alberta – covering the Peace country of Alberta) you will be a part of the diverse and vibrant community sharing knowledge and information about heritage with each other and the public. As well as having a dual membership with the Historical Society of Alberta (incorporated 1907). Dual membership includes

-   Individual ($15.00) and family ($25.00) membership – quarterly newsletter History Now
-   Combined – membership and Alberta History subscription ($35.00) – includes both newsletters
-   An Affiliate Membership ($55.00) for museums, schools, and libraries – has both newsletters an invaluable history resource for students and teachers.
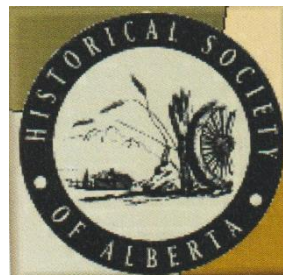
Membership allows members to receive discount rates on society tours, special events, provincial publications, etc.

Attend chapter program events, presentations, tours, workshops, book launches, socials, banquets, celebrations, AGM's and conferences.

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[ii] **Companions**, p. 87, also p. 10-11,23.