

Peace Country Historical Society
Box 897 Station Main
Grande Prairie, AB, T8V 3A8

December, 2021
Winter Issue
Volume 11 - Issue 4



Keeping History Current



**When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even**

Events

PCHS is still unable to hold in-person events and Alberta Health guidelines give no indication when this situation might change. The Board continues to monitor the situation, and is working on some Zoom presentations in lieu of holding physical events. The Kleskun Lake Ranch tour will be the first field event in the spring. To tide you over, we have a

Facebook Announcement

Our revived Facebook page is now up and running. You can find it by clicking on the following link:

<https://www.facebook.com/grou.ps/720739788067031>

When opened, you can save it in your browser's Bookmarks for quick direct access. Also, we will tie this link to the top header of the PCHS website Home page, where you can simply click the "F" button to open our Facebook Group page.

Thanks to our Facebook Committee of Ron Thoreson, Al Bromling, and David Rhody. And also to Beth Sande and Janet Peterson who developed the original page.

President's Message

Season's Greetings to You All;

This is the Winter edition of our Newsletter. The trees have gone dormant for the season, but evidence of life still abounds. There are animal tracks in the snow. The chickadees are telling each other what they have found to eat. Or they do so until the blue jays interrupt the conversation. Squirrels are as annoyed as ever about your presence, and the ravens, silent or not, watch from above as they swish along.

In the past year, the pandemic situation interrupted PCHS plans, but we were still able to participate in two events. The first was Duff Crerar's presentation on the history of the Air Cadets in the area, which still appears on PCHS's YouTube channel. The second was the Tea and Tour at Forbes House in August.

The Board continued to make improvements to our administration, our Bylaws, and launch some new projects like our Facebook Forum

This edition contains articles with a Christmas focus, the history of a church, and the introduction of some new murals to the region.

The PCHS Board wishes to extend Season's Greetings to all our members. Merry Christmas and all the best to you for the New Year.

Regards

Pat Wearmouth

Index

Events	1
President's Message	2
Index	2
Peace Country Historical Society	3
Taking Art and History to the Street	4
Some Travelled East to the Last Great West.....	6
St. Paul's United Memories	10
Christmas Traditions	11
The Next Request	21

Notices

- The Historical Society of Alberta has a policy on membership dues. Members will be reminded to renew after three months, and removed from membership after six months if no renewal is forthcoming. The Society keeps the master membership list, and receives dues on our behalf. Please go their website, www.albertahistory.org for details on categories and amount of dues and subscriptions.
- Janet Peterson is stepping back from Board duties. She will continue as a member and host the information table at events. The Board would like to acknowledge Janet for her many years of Board service to the Society. Doug Spry has been asked to fill the vacant position until elections at the next Annual General Meeting

Peace Country Historical Society

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

Mandate: The mandated area of the Peace Country Historical Society is the northwest region of Alberta

Board of Directors

Pat Wearmouth –President
Duff Crerar - Vice- President
Susan K. Thomson – Treasurer
Charles Taws – Secretary
David Leonard – Director
David Rhody – Director
Al Bromling – Director
Ron Thoreson – Director
Doug Spry – Acting Director

PCHS Committee Chairs

Irene Nicolson – Phoning
Susan Thomson – Heritage Fair, Education Kits
David Leonard – Advocacy & Land Settlement
Pat Wearmouth – Newsletter/Web presence
Charles Taws – Historic Plaque Placements
Janet Peterson – Information Table

Contact Us

Newsletter editor:

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

What We Can Offer

- A chance to help set direction for our Peace Country Chapter at membership meetings or by other communication means.
- A chance to learn about Peace Country history during presentations and tours, through Facebook, the Newsletter, and the Website.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,

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

And if you are not a member yet, please consider joining.

Taking History and Art to the Street In Beaverlodge Pat Wearmouth

Several new murals with historical themes have recently been put on permanent display in Beaverlodge. The town has had murals on exterior walls for many years. This current project has the newly formed Beaverlodge Mural Foundation adding additional murals.

According to Jim Drabble, the current President, the Foundation was created by local artists and other interested individuals, in June of 2019. After meetings over the summer and fall, they had a plan for the themes and location of the murals. A funding drive yielded a great response. Donations were made by individuals, businesses, service clubs, and industries in the area. The donations were both funds and in kind materials.

However, the developing pandemic situation at the time slowed the process considerably. To keep up community interest, the Foundation sponsored a family orientated project. Students and parents were encouraged to paint mini-murals at home using supplied material. The paintings were then collected and displayed in front of the Beaverlodge Arts and Culture Center in the spring of 2020. Currently several of these are still on display at the Community Garden between the Community Centre and the Library.

Meanwhile, materials were obtained for the full size murals which were finished over the winter and spring of 2020/21. Vicki Hotte and Coralie Rycroft, the concept artists, were aided by many others who worked on the final murals.

The unveiling of these took place in September at the South Peace Centennial Museum during their Fall Festival. From there the murals were installed on the outside walls of businesses in Beaverlodge.

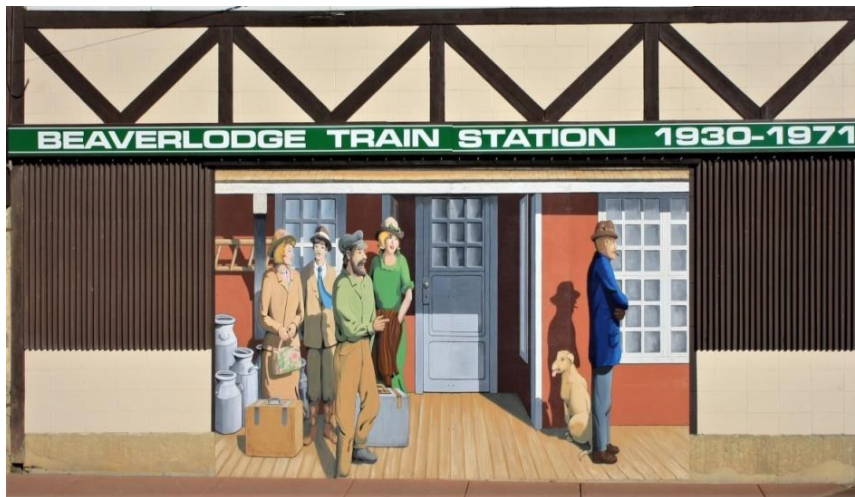
The first is titled "Waiting for the Train" and is located at the Beaverlodge Hotel on the wall that faces Highway 43. It shows passengers looking down the railway tracks in anticipation of a train's arrival. One of our long-time PCHS members, Iva Foster, was present at the unveiling and told her story of arriving in Beaverlodge by train in the 1940's.

The other mural is found on the Beaverlodge Power Sports building just as you turn up the main street. It is titled "Then and Now", and illustrates the development of agriculture in the area, from oxen powered plowing to mechanized machinery taking off a crop.

This mural is somewhat unique. When viewed at a distance, oxen, a plow, and a combine are seen. When viewed up close, the viewer will note that the painting consists of many small square tiles which form a mosaic. After the original painting was completed, it was cut up into 450 four inch tiles. These were distributed to four local schools and students were asked to paint what they wished on each square while paying attention to the original background colours. They are quite fun to view.

Two other murals are found inside the Beaverlodge Community Center. The first is another mosaic, based on a Christmas card that Euphemia McNaught created in 1972. The second mural is titled “Looking for Joy”, a wonderful celebration of spring.

The Foundation is currently exploring themes for additional murals. Thanks to the collaboration of artists and community members, the history of our region will be depicted on the streets of Beaverlodge, making both the art and our past accessible to both community members and visitors.



“Waiting for the Train”



“Then and Now”



A Tile: Can you find it?

Some Traveled East to the Last Great West
Journeys to Canadian Freedom
Ron Thoreson



This is the Volin Russian Orthodox Holy Trinity Church in Devale, which is a bit west, and then north of Spirit River, photographed in April 2007. Volin refers to the region of some of the congregant settlers' historical origins in what is now NW Ukraine.

The original parish was described in the history of the Orthodox Church in Canada as follows:

“Establishing the parish; building the Temple, 1929

The first activities in order to organize an Orthodox parish began in 1929, when Fred Nasedkin traveled with a team of horses throughout the Devale and Spirit River area, as he canvassed for donations for building the Temple. When they began to build, Alex Karol donated 2 acres of land which is now the present site of the Holy Trinity Temple and Cemetery, located 6 km (4 mi) west of Spirit River and 20 km (12 mi) north across the Rat and Ksituan Creeks. The Temple was [sanctified](#) in 1930 by [Bishop Joasaph \(born Ivan Skorodumov\)](#).

The logs were cut by the pioneer members on George Badiuk's farm who donated the timber for the church. That building served the parish from 1930 to 1956, when the construction of the present Temple building was begun".

Beyond the mention in the Orthodox church's founding history at Devale, I have been unable to find other information on "Fred" Nasedkin. He may have been misidentified from another immigrant family. I suspect that more research will help solve that particular mystery.

I was struck by the location as well as the building itself, as it stands alone in an area of open farmland. This current temple, circa 1960, stands on the site of the first building that dated to 1930, with an adjoining cemetery. In reviewing the history of the building, it brought to mind the importance of religious services that had given comfort to the families so far from their previous lives in parts of eastern Europe controlled by the Russian Empire.

The Peter Nasedkin family was one of many Russian families that adhered to the old liturgy in a dispute that dated to the mid-1600s. These people were generally known as the Old Believers (or the Old Ritualists). Seeking to follow their religious liturgy in its early version, some had hidden from or fled the Tsarist Russian government and then, ultimately, the Bolshevik Revolution until they could emigrate for both opportunity and religious freedom.

While the revolution that deposed the Tsar came to a head with his abdication in 1917 and the imprisonment and execution of the entire royal family in 1918, the violence didn't fully arrive in Manchuria and Siberia until China formally broke off relations with the Bolsheviks in 1920. This meant that anyone who had worked for the prior government were expendable, or sent to penal colonies if captured by the Bolsheviks, while the Chinese began to replace Russian workers with Chinese citizens.

Major conflict centered on the far east, in an area now known as Northeast China. The Chinese city of Harbin (which had long been under Russian control) still has a very diverse population, with an impressive Russian architectural heritage including the massive Russian Orthodox Temple of St. Sophia.

Nicholas (Nick) John Kabakoff was born in 1911 in Harbin, and it wasn't until 1924 that he became Nick Nasedkin. Ivan Kabakoff, Nick's birth father, was a young railway worker on the Trans-Siberia line. He lived in Harbin for many years with his wife and young family, but had a fatal heart attack in 1920.



Ivan Kabakoff, (l.) on bakery cart, Harbin

Peter Nasedkin lost his wife in childbirth at about the same time. Having three small

children, in 1922 he remarried. He took on the added responsibility of a recent widow, Evdokia Kabakoff, with her five small children.

Peter Nasedkin's and other Russian families faced many dangers due to lawless Bolshevik militias who preyed on any Russians hoping for safety and freedom by crossing the border into Chinese-held territory. Still, in 1924 they reached the Chinese port of Dalian, taking a rough boat to Yokohama, where the impressive Canadian Pacific steamship liners like the Empress of Canada, and the Empress of Russia carried them safely to Vancouver.

Courtesy of CP Rail, and a Canadian policy to welcome immigrant farmers, they headed further eastward to join other Russian families in Homeglen. It was in wooded rolling hills west of Wetaskiwin in central Alberta. Seeking better farmland, a group of eleven of those emigree families later moved to the Hines Creek, Devale, and the Spirit River area, where Nick and his father Peter filed on adjoining homestead quarters in 1929. Later, the family moved again and considered the hamlet of Gage, north of Fairview, as their last ancestral home, and Peter Nasedkin's final resting place.



Peter & Evdokia, son Victor (b. Canada 1925) ca. 1940

As a boy of 13, Nick was apprenticed to a German butcher for four years, and it became his life's work when he followed his family to the Peace River area. Prior to 1940, and after he returned in 1945 from military service in the European theatre, Nick and brother Jim Nasedkin ran the Beaverlodge Meat Market for many years. They were always strong community boosters. In the 1950s and '60s, they also rented frozen storage lockers for families, before home freezers became commonplace in homes.



Jim, left, and Nick in their shop, before WW2

Many of the early Russo-Greek Orthodox immigrant families often came from various parts of Ukraine. Most, though, traveled further to the west to reach Canada's east coast, then onward to Alberta.

From whichever direction they arrived, many immigrants including my maternal grandparents from central Ukraine and others traveled many miles to Spirit River, Hines Creek, High Prairie, or Devale for special Orthodox church events. Celebrations of faith and conversations in the language of their birth

drew early settlers despite travel hardships. No matter the distance traveled, or whether the structure was humble or grand, the sight of the Orthodox domes promised a warm welcome and the comfort of a familiar liturgy.

While some came to our province and the Peace region, arriving after the physical hardships of a long and perhaps boring trip, there were other families who escaped their former lands under the threat of torture and death. They were able to find the courage to continue that perilous journey, often with their small children in tow, seeking to build a safe future for their families.

These stories need to be put forward in detail to celebrate and archive those tales of quiet, desperate courage. Current generations of families risk being poorer if that history is lost. Are you keeping a family story hidden that deserves to be shared, possibly for the first time?

Sources:

For the complete history of the temple and its early congregation, there is a detailed page on the Orthodox Canada website at:
[http://orthodoxcanada.ca/Spirit_River_\(Devale\)_AB_Holy_Trinity_Russo_Orthodox_Church_and_Cemetery_1929](http://orthodoxcanada.ca/Spirit_River_(Devale)_AB_Holy_Trinity_Russo_Orthodox_Church_and_Cemetery_1929)

- Devale Temple photo 2007, Ron Thoreson
- Jim (left) and Nick in their pre-war butcher shop in Beaverlodge, courtesy Nasedkin family
- Ivan Kabakoff (left) and a friend, (possibly the bakery owner Mr. A. Chunias) had a picture taken of the “Your Favourite Bakery” delivery cart in front of a Harbin photo shop. Courtesy Nasedkin family.
- Family History of White Russians in Siberia and Alberta, “*All This Shall Pass*”, 1995, Polly Sideroff Elder

St. Paul's United Church Christmas Memories

Margaret Bowes

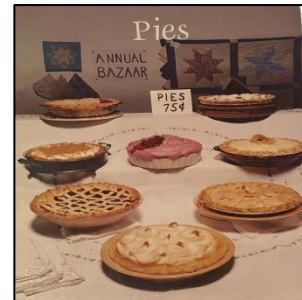
The first women's group formed at St. Paul's was the W.M.S. (Women's Missionary Society) in 1921 - imagine, 100 years ago! Their main interest was support for United Church Missionaries, many of whom were doctors working in Africa. In 1938, the W.A. (Women's Association) was formed and one of their main concerns was support for the necessities and improvements for the church-owned manse. In 1962 the groups became the UCW (United Church Women).



Craft Items

For years, the women joined forces to have a Christmas Bazaar and tea to raise money for those endeavours and other projects. This was the harbinger of Christmas celebrations! Large crowds would attend the bazaars where a huge variety of handicrafts and baking was for sale. Dozens of aprons, mittens, children's sweaters, and other handmade items, plus homemade bread, buns, and Christmas treats were for sale. Following the Bazaar, at the beginning of Advent, the women would put the Christmas

decorations up in the Sanctuary - many of which had been carefully stored and used for many years. The men installed the big Christmas tree. The Junior and Senior choirs would begin practicing their special music, and the Sunday School would practice for their Christmas pageant. This usually involved the girls dressed as angels wearing the white Junior choir surpluses with the silver Christmas cord around their hair, and the boys would be the shepherds wearing bathrobes tied around the waist and some sort of towel around their heads. Everyone was involved!



Pie at \$0.75

The Sunday before Christmas the CGIT (Canadian Girls in Training) held their Vesper service which was a highlight of the church Christmas activities. The girls conducted the service which was concluded when the girls would line up on the aisles outside the church pews with candles



L to R. Janet Riddle, Linda Clark, Jane Watson, Carol Stojan, Beth Turner.

which would be lit from one to the other. When all the candles were lit, the lights would be turned off and the girls would sing Taps.

Christmas Eve was an exciting time with families gathering for the Christmas Eve service which had the choirs' special music, plus a lot of the traditional carols sung by everyone, and these traditions continue on today.

Christmas Traditions The PCHS Membership

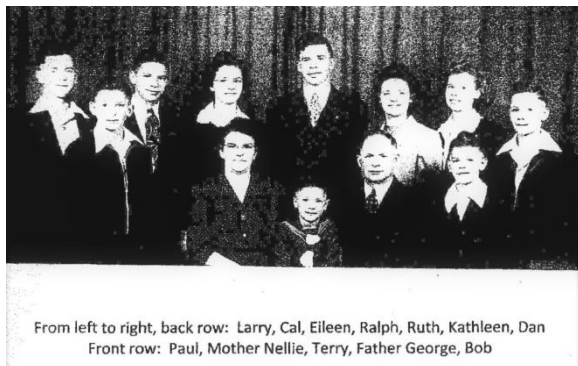


PCHS members shared some Christmas traditions for the newsletter.
Thanks to all those who contributed. Your stories are great!

Lila Balisky:

I will say just a bit about my Christmases in Kenya Colony (British) as a girl: I lived there from age 5-17 at a highland station overlooking the Great Rift Valley with my parents who were medical missionaries. Each year in about August, Mom would open the Montgomery Ward Catalogue and we five daughters would select a dress that we'd like. Then we would order and the package would be mailed to us by sea, so it was a little miracle if we received the package by Christmas time! Kenya was a British colony at that time, and there was an old British pilot and his wife who would fly over our mountains and drop single candies from his plane as a gift to the children in the villages of the Kikuyu people who lived in that area. As a little girl pondering life, I was never too sure about the effectiveness of that venture but I figured they were trying to be generous. It was a much forested area, so most of the candies were probably "for the birds"! In my mind, it certainly didn't explain much about the meaning of Christmas. Then during our almost forty years in Ethiopia, we celebrated 80 Christmases! How can that be? This is because we had occasion to celebrate two Christmases a year - our western date plus the Orthodox calendar date that celebrates Christmas (Genna) on January 7 (Julian calendar). Before Ethiopian Christmas the outdoor markets bulge with live sheep waiting slaughter for the Ethiopian Christmas feast. Everyone dresses up in their best white woven-cotton dresses or jodhpurs with intricate embroidered borders. We would always be invited to an Ethiopian home for their celebration and would get all dressed up in Ethiopian garb, then enjoy a typical feast with good friends. Even here in Grande Prairie, for the past 15 years, we have dressed up in appropriate garb and celebrated the January 7 Christmas in grand style with dear Ethiopian friends who keep all the cultural traditions.

Paul Balisky



From left to right, back row: Larry, Cal, Eileen, Ralph, Ruth, Kathleen, Dan
Front row: Paul, Mother Nellie, Terry, Father George, Bob

"My recollection of the 1948 Christmas Eve celebration in the George and Nellie Balisky home"

The Saturday before Christmas two of my older brothers, Cal and Larry were sent by horse and sleigh north of our farm to find a well-formed Christmas tree which was subsequently erected and decorated in our living room. I still recall the pungent spruce smell that soon pervaded the whole house. Several days before the Christmas

celebration, four of my older siblings would arrive home for the celebration: two from high school in Grande Prairie, and two from the Peace River Bible Institute in Sexsmith. Food

preparations for the Christmas event were a family enterprise. Typical of most farm families in those post-war years, our yard was replete with produce ready for feasting at Christmas - turkeys, geese, chickens, and pigs. Everyone pitched in to pluck and slaughter. But there was one special Christmas food that Father George carefully supervised - it was the making of *kutya* - a special Ukrainian dish of slow-boiled wheat (with the bran removed by pounding the grain in a wooden container) with poppy seeds added. This was served as an appetizer to the Christmas Eve meal. Churning the crank on the 2-gallon ice cream maker was the task of the younger set of Balisky boys. After Mother Nellie poured the tasty ingredients into the two-gallon container, she gave us strict orders not to open the lid until we could feel the crank was getting hard to turn. Well, when our arms got tired, we opened the lid and sampled the unfrozen ice cream!

The Mennonite/Baptist Balisky family were rather ecumenical during the winter months when road travel was limited. So, on Sundays we travelled by horse and sleigh to attend the Norwegian Pentecostal church located just NW of the Balisky farm. On Christmas Eve there was a special service at this church which we as a family looked forward to. It was after returning from that service that we 12 would sit down to a scrumptious Christmas Eve supper. Mother Nellie had one rule for us younger lads when we sat at the table - "Boys, remember to keep one foot on the floor - no reaching!" After supper we would all gather around the Christmas tree and before we would open our gifts, Father George and Mother Nellie would pray for the many missionaries, graduates of PRBI, who had gone out from the Peace Country to many parts of the world. Of course, we youngsters were anxious to get on with opening our Christmas gifts. So, that is my recollection of the Balisky family.

Al & Freddi Bromling



This Christmas story has two threads: my own prairie homesteader family experience and my wife's immigrant family experience which then fold into our joint family traditions in the Peace Country. You will hear two voices sharing these stories.

I was raised on the open prairie in a second-generation German settler family. Family gatherings, Church, and food were important aspects of Christmas. For my parents, the northern European-Germanic tradition of harvesting an evergreen to mark the celebration was strong. On the prairie, we had to suffice with what they could buy for two or three dollars in the local town. The 1947 photo shows us making do with what would later be called a Charlie Brown Christmas Tree. In my adult life, the Peace Country boreal forest allowed us to fully enjoy the hike into the forest as a valued Christmas tradition.

The Dutch Tradition



December in the Netherlands has two celebrations: the St. Nicholas (Sinterklaas) celebration (feest) and Christmas. On December 5, 1953 we were living in a coastal fishing village in the Netherlands. There have always been regional differences in the way Sinterklaas Feest is celebrated, and my family and our neighbours (all of us coming from

different traditions, living in a 'new' post-war housing project) made our own variation.

Although Sinterklaas Day is actually December 6 (some say his birthday, others say the anniversary of his death), celebrations happen the evening before, making December 5 the really important day for children! Traditionally, there was much family 'gezelligheid' (socializing, food and games) on the evening of December 5. This year (first time ever!!) , Sinterklaas came to visit in person, to review our behaviour over the past year (we were all amazing children!), and hand out traditional treats such as marzipan 'fruit', handfuls of Pepernoten (small round gingery cookies) and chocolate letters, and a gift for each of the children.

Later, we put out our shoes, filled with straw and carrots for the Saint's trusty white steed, hoping for some treats before Sinterklaas got back on the steamship to Spain (his home) the next morning. There are many variations on this setting out of shoes: some put them out during the time that Sinterklaas is resident in the Netherlands (he arrives on the steamship from Spain weeks before) but we used to put them out on the evening of December 5.

Christmas Celebration on the farm

Christmas 1953 was spent with my grandparents, on the family farm in the country. Christmas was a religious holiday, with church services on both the 'First' and 'Second' days of Christmas. It was also a time of family 'gezelligheid': the First day of Christmas usually spent at home with family and the Second day of Christmas taken up by visits with extended family and friends. Delicious meals were prepared, including delicacies such as smoked eel and pickled herring, along with treats like 'banket' (puff pastry filled with almond paste), nuts, (rum filled) chocolates, all manner of sweets, Boerenjongens/Farmboys (brandy-soaked raisins), Boerenmeisjes/Farmgirls (brandy soaked dried apricots), and Advokaat (a thick brandy eggnog). Holly decorating the house and a tree decorated with candy chocolate wreaths (which we were allowed to pick off and eat, eventually!), glass balls and real candles in clip-on metal holders (major fire hazard, particularly in a thatched roof house!).

Both celebrations have changed in the Netherlands over the years, becoming much more commercialized, but there are still two separate celebrations.

When my family emigrated to Canada in 1954, these separate celebrations were left behind, and we began the process of blending our December celebrations into one celebration centered on Christmas. While some traditions have lingered (mostly the edible ones!), some have been revived, and some have j been abandoned; we have never again celebrated twice in December!

Merging Traditions in the Peace Country family

Since we married in 1971 our festive traditions have consolidated, keeping a core of Dutch and German derived activities with Canadian additions. We embraced the Christmas turkey tradition which had not been part of either family custom. Since we have lived in boreal forest communities while raising our children, the northern European/German tradition of harvesting a tree for the celebration became central to our own activities. Our Christmas treks into the forest with the family (children, then grandchildren) always included spirited debates about which tree would be perfect of us this year. (Yes, we always had an Alberta Forestry permit in

hand.) Once the Christmas tree was in place, the celebration became mostly about the food where the Dutch and Canadian traditions have been blended and greatly enjoyed.

Duff Crerar

When we first celebrated Christmas here in 1990, I talked about getting our first real tree. But the winter was so cold! I had never seen ice fog lock down a city, where following propane powered truck was like flying in the clouds. I was advised that a 1985 Buick was unsafe to drive south out of town. I was glad to take the "seconds" tree from my colleague. When I got the tree into the house, it became clear that something was wrong. The tree that looked a good six feet outside turned out to be about four and a half feet tall inside. The long bushy branches I had pictured turned out more like a modified pipe cleaner. Greenhorn that I was, I had a lot to learn about black spruce. Our Christmas picture with the kids convinced our families back in Ontario that we were living at the tree line! All the kids could say was, "Dad picked the tree".

Anne Haycock



In Sweden, St. Lucia's Day marks the beginning of the Christmas celebration.

Lucia is an ancient mythical figure with an abiding role as a bearer of light in the dark Swedish winters, darkness and light, cold and warmth.

On that day, the eldest daughter of the family traditionally dresses in white and wears a crown. The crown is an evergreen wreath studded with candles. She would serve coffee and baked goods, such as saffron bread (lussekatter) to the parents and family. It is also served to visitors during the day. The festival is meant to bring hope and light during the darkest time of the year.

I did this in my family and it was great fun...but I did not have the best balance and that wreath was difficult to keep in that precarious position for very long.

Campbell Ross

We listen to Alan Maitland read Frederick Forsyth's 'The Shepherd' on CBC Radio each Christmas Eve.

Charles Taws

I grew up in the east during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Our Christmas traditions generally followed the established Canadian norms. We looked forward to television specials like "Dr. Seuss, How the Grinch Stole Christmas" and "A Charlie Brown Christmas". This was before DVDs, so we only saw them once a year and they were eagerly anticipated and filled our conversations at school the next day. Christmas dinner was the traditional turkey and often it was a big British roast beef supper for New Year's.

Some unique things about our Christmas celebrations stemmed from the fact that my Mother's parents originally came from Switzerland. My Grandparents emigrated in the 1920's and settled in Montreal. We lived north of Toronto and Christmas was one of only two times a year that we saw them. They would travel by train and Grandma always showed up with bags and bags of tins and boxes filled with tasty treats.

The favourite was Fasnachtschuechli which sounded to our ears "Fasnacht earlies" and we called them "earlies". These are made from a sweet dough, stretched super thin, deep fried until crisp, then blotted and sprinkled with icing sugar. They seem simple enough but are hard to make and ours never tasted as good as Grandma's. Once my sister tried to make them. She had trouble rolling the dough out to the thinness required using a rolling pin, but Grandma could achieve it by simply stretching the dough over her knee! These really were our most favourite. The dog loved them too, but these were far too good to share with her (at least not all the time).

Other Swiss treats included Basler Lackerli. This is a kind of a light gingerbread, but it doesn't have ginger in it. It has honey, hazelnuts, candied peel, and kirsch. It's a specialty of the City of Basel where spice merchants invented the recipe in the 1400s. Heavier but similar is Appenzeller Biberli. This again was like gingerbread but with no ginger in it. It is flavoured with cinnamon, cloves, anise, and nutmeg. It also has an almond filling and can come in different shapes or with scenes moulded on the top. It comes from the Appenzell region of Switzerland which is near where my Grandmother came from.

Not necessarily Swiss, but she would also bring croissants from the Geneva Bakery in Montreal. These were true French croissant and very buttery and delicious. I grade all croissants from my memory of those buttery delights, and few have equalled them.

Susan Thomson

Memories from Port Williams, Nova Scotia

Christmas is a time of magic and memories. It is a time to remember all the great times of being a kid at Christmastime. When I look back on my childhood, I experienced Christmas Eve and Christmas morning very differently than my Christmas of today. Christmas morning was filled with magic! You see, I am the oldest of six children, all born in under nine years. We were close in age and born to young parents. My parents met when my mom was 13 and my dad was 18. They married when my mom was 18 and never looked back. I will always remember piling into a Volkswagen Beetle. Baby on mom's lap, three in the back seat and two littles in the cubby hole (the cargo space behind the back seat, in front of the rear window). Of course, dad did the driving. There were few cars and no seatbelts in the 1960's.

Family was all around. My dad grew up with seven siblings and three of them lived within five miles of us. My mom grew up with five siblings and four of them lived within a five miles radius. Needless to say, cousin time was the best and my cousins were my best friends, many to this day. Two of my mom's sisters married two brothers so I even had double cousins. To say we were close is an understatement. Growing up in a large family with most of my aunts, uncles

and cousins living close by meant there was never a shortage of family responsibilities. Always someone needing a hand to get something done meant we were often together “getting it done!” Oh! My grandparents were within that distance as well.

As a child, Christmas arrived in our home on Christmas Eve. There would be lights strung outside in the yard, and on the house, but no meaningful signs of Christmas and the anticipated arrival of Santa, inside the house. As kids, we headed off to bed around 8 - 8:30 PM and dad often said that everyone was asleep by 9:30 PM. Indications of Christmas in our house was special cookies having been baked along with special fruits and nuts that had been purchased for the season. On those Christmas eves that sleep would evade us, one of my uncles, or maybe it was my dad, would be under a window shouting “Ho, Ho, Ho! Are the children sleeping?” Boy oh boy! We force ourselves to go to sleep quickly! Then my parents would go to work! Dad would have selected a tree, cut it down and hid it somewhere close to home for easy access.

I think it sat in the barn, in the backyard, to warm up and be made ready to come inside. Now we could decorate. String the lights, always the multi-coloured, carefully place the ornaments on, then put on the tinsel, one strand at a time. You remember the packages of tinsel? Each strand went on one at a time and carefully came off, one strand at a time. The angel holding a star was placed on top! She was beautiful! She shone brightly with a golden hue! Lastly the angel hair was carefully added over the entire tree giving it a glow of magic. Now to decorate the rest of the house! We were certain the elves came along with Santa to get the house ready because it was magical when we would come down in the wee hours of the morning.

Under the tree and across much of the living room floor and furniture would be gifts from Santa, gifts from our aunts, uncles and many close family friends, friends that were like family! The Santa gifts were usually never wrapped. They were out front because Santa was a busy fellow and he would quickly place the dolls and trucks and be on his way. We always had some time to play with our Santa gifts before digging into the tree.

Oh! Did I mention, my parents would often get to bed around 3:30 or 4 AM and the kids would get each other up by 6 AM! We were never sent back to bed. There was so much magic. The air was electrified! I do not know who enjoyed it more, the kids or my parents!

Ron Thorson

Every family looks to their traditions on special occasions, and most revolve around food that fulfils both the spirit of the celebration, and the unifying role of food for a hungry family. Ukrainian religious tradition calls for fasting in four periods, the longest being the 40 days prior to Christmas day of the Julian calendar (January 6 on our Gregorian calendar) for the strictly observant.

While my grandparents followed the Christmas dates of the Julian calendar, like many immigrant arrivals the fasting regimen was less rigid in its application, though the foods were prepared as defined by the church. There was a marked difference between the fasting-

oriented ceremonial foods of Christmas Eve, and the full feasting on Christmas Day, and normally, our family celebration was moved to December 25th. Their observance of the January 6 date, though, was more focused on the Orthodox Church with their fellow congregants. The twelve foods (one for each apostle) served on the Eve were meatless and differed because of that. Always starting with “kutya”, the whole kernel wheat, poppy seed, and honey porridge with its ceremony, next there was borscht, a beet and mushroom soup, and occasionally sour leaf sorrel borscht.

There were a number of appetizer-like dishes such as pickled mushrooms, vinaigrette salad, bean salad, and pickled or marinated herring. These were followed by perogies with either sauerkraut or potato filling (or servings of both), and meatless cabbage rolls with tomato sauce. If you are still counting, don’t forget the garlic!

Depending on adherence to church guidelines there may be jellied or deep-fried whitefish, but for the stricter rules, the fish would be served Christmas day. Since any type of shellfish were classed as “meatless”, fried oysters were appropriate and delicious, and my aunt sent quarts of shucked Fanny Bay oysters from near her home in Campbell River. As there were no relatives to send food items from the east coast, we were deprived of lobsters for Ukrainian Christmas Eve even though approved by church decree.

The last serving was uzvar, a juice punch made from (ideally, another 12) fruit items. In his own special brand of magic, by Christmas Day my grandfather was somehow able to conjure the remains of the previous evening’s juice punch into a potent, sweet and delicious berry wine with hints of strawberries, apricots, grapes, and plums. I’m afraid I just can’t recall the other eight ingredients, but it was memorable in its own special way. Here’s wishing you a joyous Christmas season!

Pat Wearmouth

My family’s Christmas traditions were typical Canadian ones, although they may have leaned slightly to an English and Irish heritage. Plum pudding with hard sauce was I think, one of them. The next was our own. It was the opening of an annual parcel from my mother’s aunt who lived in England. Each year she would collect weekly and monthly comics and then send them to Canada near Christmas time. On Christmas morning my brother and I would open up the parcel to see comics with names like Beano, Dandy, and Boy’s Own Paper. Mostly, we understood what we read. But once in a while we would have to ask someone to interpret the English word meanings or the humour (with a “u” of course) we were reading. It was a very different world from ours in northern Alberta.

The other annual tradition was the timing of our gift opening. My father was employed as a railway locomotive engineer. Since a railway operates 24 hours a day over 365 days a year, there was always a chance that Dad would not be home for Christmas. Train crews were called to work in rotation, and it was hard to predict when the call might come.

If he was not home on Christmas Eve we would wait until the next day. If he was home, but knew a call would come during the night, we were allowed to open quite a few of the gifts in the evening. Not Santa’s of course, for he did not arrive until we were asleep.

Either way my brother and I would be allowed to open at least one present of our choice on Christmas Eve. We always chose books as we knew if we opened a toy, we would only be able to play for a short time before Mom sent to bed to await Santa. With a book, you could read under the covers with a flashlight. It was the one night of the year we weren't scolded for wasting batteries if we used them too long. They were expensive, and they did not last very long compared to today.

Daryl White

My mother was born in Finland and her family moved to Canada when she was 9. My mummo (my grandmother) lived with us until I was in high school.

The Finns observe most of their Christmas rituals the night before - joulupukki visits. My mother tells stories of him carrying a switch and asking the parents if the children had been good. The large meal is consumed and gifts are opened. Christmas morning was for attending church.

My father's parents were from England, so we blended traditions. Our Finnish Christmas eve consisted of candlelight service at church, our dinner of ham, scalloped potatoes, rutabaga casserole and rice pudding. By tradition, there is one almond concealed in the rice pudding. If you get it in your dish, you have good luck for the year. My brother and I were also allowed to open our presents to each other that night. We had to wait for the rest of it the next morning.

We always had a real Christmas tree. I like spruce trees with the short needles, but my Dad preferred the Scotch Pines with long sharp needles. They sure hurt when you touched them as you hung ornaments. It was like getting a needle at the doctors. Christmas tree light bulbs were bigger back then and I remember there were two cloth covered wires that went to each bulb. Just below the bulb the wires ran through a red painted round wooden ball with two holes drilled in them to allow the wires to pass through. You had to put the end of the branch through the two wires, then pull the red ball up to the light bulb and that would secure the bulb to the branch.

My Grandfather was born in 1900. When he was young, they used candles to light the Christmas tree. He said they'd shave a few needles off a branch, light a candle and let the wax drip onto the branch, place the candle in the hot wax until it solidified and that's how they attached the candles to the tree. I know they made tin clips to hold candles onto trees in those days, but Grandpa's family didn't have those. It doesn't sound very safe, but I don't remember him ever mentioning a fire.

Another unusual aspect of our Christmas is my mother would mix Swiss music records with the Christmas records and place them in a pile over the turntable in the big cabinet stereo in the living room. That way the top side of each record would come down and play and she wouldn't have to fuss with changing the records too much. To this day I think of Christmas when I hear yodeling. Of course, Christmas is a busy time and sometimes we didn't get the right record back into the right cardboard sleeve which could cause some confusion the next Christmas.

It's always pleasant to reminisce on happy Christmas' past but let's not forget to make new memories this Christmas. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year everyone.

Wanda Zenner

As a child, the best thing about Christmas, other than the gifts of course, was "getting" the tree. Mom would make a thermos of hot chocolate and dad and I would head out to find the perfect tree. It meant tramping through the snow for a considerable amount of time to find just the right one. Then chopping it down and dragging it back to the truck. Finally we could enjoy the hot chocolate. Once home, more trimming occurred to make the tree fit in the living room. And if there was a side that wasn't full enough, dad would drill a holes in the trunk of the tree and affix some of the branches he had cut off. What wonderful days those were!!

Community Traditions

Christmas traditions were also created by communities.

A look through a century's worth of local newspapers found on microfilm in the Grande Prairie Public Library reveals that the same named Christmas event would be held in multiple districts of the Peace Country. They were reported year after year in the December editions of the newspapers. The events were most certainly traditional.

Attending Church services was a part of most Districts' Christmas traditions. The times for special Christmas services would be published in the newspapers.

Another tradition that lasted for many years was something called the Christmas Tree. This did not refer to an actual tree, although there was one, but rather an event. It appears to have been held, particularly during "tough times", to ensure that all children in a community would receive at least one present and some candy. The newspapers reported these events from the early settlement years, through the 1930's Depression, and up to at least the end of WWII.

The Christmas Tree would be held in a hall or school, which was decorated and had a Christmas tree set up. A program of songs, recitations, and choruses, often done by the children themselves, would be presented. As the entertainment came to an end, sleigh bells and a loud ho-ho-ho would be heard, and Santa would appear. He would be carrying a bag, and from it would distribute gifts to the children, as well as candy and nuts. Thereafter lunch or supper would be served to end the event.

The tradition died out somewhat as communities became more prosperous, but the tradition of children entertaining families continued to this day, in the form of Christmas concerts.

Churches and schools held them so that children could present plays, songs and choruses for the community. Teachers, both school and Sunday school, often spent weeks preparing for them. There were costumes, scenery and decorations to make, and lines to practice, and often chaos reigned. Some teachers would feel they must produce perfection, others were more

relaxed. Likewise a few children were natural performers and thrived on stage. Others would have preferred not to be there, or at the most, be able to stand in the back and not be heard.

“Christmas is for the kids” was a much repeated theme December’s newspapers. The adults though had their time on New Year’s Eve. Reports announcing the dances or reporting upon them appear every year though the entire newspaper record, and are from many different Districts.

One of the first held as settlement began related how in 1910, a dance was held which by at Bear Creek (now Grande Prairie). An early settler reported that “We danced and we ate, and we danced again. There were fiddles, an organ, and a mouth organ for music. We danced the waltz, the two step, three step, four step, and quadrilles galore, interspersed with step dancing. Many a pair of moccasins were discarded in the morning”. The tradition of a dance continues to this day.

To finish, here are some bits of trivia on two other traditions that many will recall. They were the hanging of the Christmas stocking, and the movies or television that we might watch each year.



The tradition of hanging stockings on Christmas Eve is attributed to an early Christian, Saint Nicholas, who was born in the 3rd century in what is now Turkey. He was said to have thrown some gold coins either through a window or down a chimney, which landed in the stockings of three poor girls who had hung them over the fireplace to dry. St. Nicholas eventually transformed into the Santa Claus we know today. The name, Santa Claus evolved from the Dutch “Sinter Klass”, a shortened form of Sint Nikolaas which is St. Nicholas in that language.



There are 135 film adaptations of Charles Dickens’ story the “Christmas Carol” which he wrote in 1843. The first was done in 1916 and titled “The Right to be Happy”. The latest one to date was released in 2019. Animated versions include one with the Muppets. One of the best in my generation, and one probably familiar to most of us, was made in 1951. It starred Alistair Sims as Scrooge.

The Next Request

This is our Winter Edition of the Newsletter. Although it focuses on the Christmas season, there are still three months of winter to enjoy or endure, depending on your outlook. The request is that members send in some memories of how your families and communities spent those three months every year. The stories will be published in the March edition of the newsletter as we come to the end of this winter.

The request for Christmas traditions was a great success. People who sent them in appeared to have enjoyed reliving those memories. They were also looked forward to reading other member's experiences. Let's duplicate that success and tell our stories to one another.

You might want to consider a range of activities such as participation in winter sports, social events like dances or card parties, and hobbies and crafts that were enjoyed. Did people follow different kinds of work during winter months? For instance did they take seasonal work in forestry, coal mining, the early oil and gas enterprises, or trapping?

The possibilities for a story are endless. They need not be long or complicated as can be seen from the Christmas traditions article. Please give it a try. Many hands make light work.

Thank you.

The Editor