

Keeping History Current



**Promise of Spring Time
Kleskun Hills Crocus and February Pussy Willows**

Events

The winter has passed without an opportunity to get together to enjoy in-person events, which would have included coffee, tea, and cookies of course.

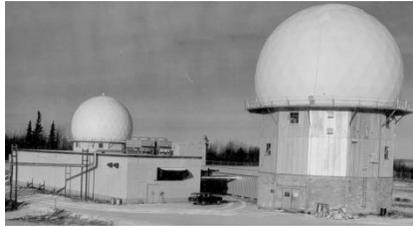
However things are looking up. Two events are shown in the posters on the following page, and two more are being planned.

They are:

- Currently Available: A video presentation on the Cold War Experiences in the Peace Country
- April 5th: In cooperation with the Grande Prairie and District Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society, an in-person presentation on George Dawson's 1879 Survey of the Peace.
- TBA: A presentation on the completion of the Land Settlement Data Base in which we shared costs.
- TBA: A tour of the Kleskun Lake Ranch

Stay tuned.

Warming Up to the Cold War The Peace Country Experience



The Peace Country Historical Society is pleased to present a video on the Cold War experiences in the Peace Country. The video tells the story of a forgotten radar line that ran through the region, and the planning efforts made to survive, should the worst happen.

The video can be found by searching on YouTube for Peace Country Historical Society, then scrolling to look for the title above. Alternatively, go to the pc-hs.ca webpage and find a link to the video there.

The Grande Prairie and District Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society

In cooperation with

The Peace Country Historical Society and the Grande Prairie
Public Library

Invite you to a free public presentation

By Mr. Pat Wearmouth



George Dawson: Surveys of the South Peace - 1879

Mr. Wearmouth is President of
The Peace Country Historical Society.
He is a retired forester with a strong interest in the
history of the Peace River Country.

When: April 5, 2022

**Location: Rotary Community Room
Grande Prairie Public Library**

Time: 6:00 pm

President's Message

Greetings to You All;

This is the Spring edition of our Newsletter. The first edition of our twelfth year as a Society.

The ravens have been sweet talking their mates for the last month. The snow is receding and there is some certainty that spring will arrive.

April 1st will be the start of our new fiscal year, as given in our recently revised bylaws. This will result in at least two positive things. The first is that our year end will align with the Historical Society of Alberta and the Government of Alberta. We will no longer have to add or subtract months when reporting to them.

The second is that we will be able to hold our Annual General Meetings much nearer our springtime year end without fear of winter weather disrupting attendance.

This edition contains remembrances of winter pastimes, and an article on a sawmill camp. As well, building on an article from our last newsletter, we continue to follow the story of families that came to the Peace Country in 1924.

Regards

Pat Wearmouth

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Notice of Dues

- Many PCHS members will have their membership fees being due on April 1st, 2022.
- 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,
OR
phone their office at (403) 261-3662 for details on your due date, and the categories and amount of dues and subscriptions

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
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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

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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, the Website, and 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 with, or join our Society.

Winter Pastimes



Men's hockey, Women's hockey, Women's curling, Ski jumping
Photos courtesy South Peace Regional Archives

The previous edition of the Newsletter pointed out that once the Christmas holiday season was over, there was still at least three months of the Peace Country winter left to enjoy or endure, depending on your perspective. We wondered what our members did in order to help pass the time. As it turns out, it was quite a lot.

Hockey: played with boots on the street, or with skates on back yard rinks, sloughs, ponds, lakes, and in arenas. Sealer rings holding up magazines or catalogues to protect the knees. Men's and women's teams played the game.

Skating: done on the same ice, but minus the equipment.

Figure Skating: Amateur and professional shows. Endless practices to perform with grace under pressure.

Curling: The swish or the slap of the corn brooms. The players wore tartan. Bonspiels were held in various communities, a chance to reacquaint with friends.

Tobogganing: almost any hill would do. It's a free ride until you have to go up again.

Skiing: cross country, downhill, and most dramatically, ski jumping in the Bear Creek valley.

Snow forts: build on either side of the road for snowball fights. Or dig amazing tunnels in roadside snow banks, and worry your Mom.

Dancing: on a Saturday night in your community or a neighboring one. And square dancing clubs that danced five miles a night all across the Peace, perhaps Demmitt being one of the best known.

Cribbage: playing cribbage at the kitchen table with Grandpa. What to discard?

Bridge: Many clubs and tournaments in the Peace. It seemed like serious business.

Music: Many festivals with local choirs and bands. The University of Alberta choirs, by passenger train to the Peace Country and into billets.

Reading: Community libraries, travelling libraries, and the Grande Prairie Book Club that was founded in 1939 and still carries on after 83 years.

The pastimes were not that different from other Canadian experiences, as Charles explains in his story below.

Winter Memories

Charles Taws

I moved to Grande Prairie at the end of 2015. Coming from Ontario, I expected very cold winters (much like we've had in 2021-22). However, my first two winters here were very mild and not too far off a normal Ontario winter. That changed in subsequent years when the thermometer dipped below the minus 50 mark. A friend showed me that if you take a cup of boiling water and throw it outside, at those temperatures, the water freezes in mid-air!

I am not a novice to cold weather as I spent my earliest years in Montreal. One year the snow caused us to miss so much school that when spring came, we had to stay a half an hour later every day to make up the lost time. I remember my older brothers used to get up at 4am to start shoveling the driveway so our Dad could get to work. We had a carport that was about 12 feet tall. Sometimes my Dad would hire a truck with a plow to clear our driveway. He did this by running the truck up the driveway and pushing the snow through the carport and out the back end. One year we had so much snow we could scamper up the snow and get on top of the carport roof.

The piles of snow on the side of the road towered over us kids. I bet they were over 8 feet high in many places. We'd construct elaborate forts with tunnels and secret chambers. One on particularly snowy year my brother Gordon was able to carve out a two-story fort in the snow drift. Eventually the upper level caved in on the lower and he had to be dug out. On the roads, the piles of snow created a kind of a canyon. One time I was walking home and saw a snowplow coming towards me. I couldn't see any way it could get by me as the roadway was narrowed by the snow. It kept getting closer and closer, so I ran back the way I came, ducked down another street and walked home a different way that day. I wonder if the plow operator laughed or breathed a sigh of relief that day.

The snow was great for sledding. We started out with the traditional wooden sled but later got those plastic flexible carpets which seemed to work just as well. We also got a toboggan. For some reason my Dad wrote all our names on it including the dog's. It was always nice to see the names every winter when we took it out.

In Quebec maple syrup production is a big business and many farms have a sugar shack to supplement their income. I remember going to one that had the ruins of an ancient stone windmill. I bet it went back to the 1700s! We would get a square wooden box, open at the top. It had been filled with snow. They drizzled the maple syrup on the snow and then we would roll it up on sticks to make a kind of maple lollypop.

To get to school we'd have to wear snow suits and big brown rubber boots. I think they were hand-me-downs from my older brothers. They had buckles on the side to tighten them up. Now, if your old enough to know the difference between your right and left foot, no problem, the buckles are on the outside. But, to us, in kindergarten, we would put them on the wrong way, with buckles on the inside, invariably tripping while running through the snow as the buckles caught each other. That's one way to learn your left and right.

Working

In addition to of the winter months, there was work to be done. The Peace Country for many years was a rural society. When farming was done for the year, there were still animals to care for, but time was often available for seasonal work. Employment in trapping, coal mining, and in later years, the oil patch were all possibilities. But for many years, the biggest seasonal employer was the forest industry. There were hundreds of mills scattered through the region. They were at their busiest during the winter. Labour was available as the farm work diminished, and access to the forest was possible because the ground was frozen.

The following article, titled "Moon's Mill" was written by Wanda Zenner. It describes one of the larger forest industry camps in the area.

This article was previously been published in a 2015 edition of the Forest History Association of Alberta's magazine. Thanks to Wanda for permission to publish it here.

MOON'S MILL

A Sawmill Way of Life

By Wanda Zenner

Charlie Moon, along with his siblings and widowed mother, Elizabeth, left Orillia Ontario in 1905 for Edmonton where they resided until 1912 with the elder Moon boys working in lumber camps. Upon hearing of the opportunities for homestead land in the Peace District, the family made the arduous trip over the Edson Trail and settled in an area northwest of the Bezanson Townsite. As all of Charlie's brothers filed on land in close proximity to each other, the area soon became known as the "Moon Settlement". To supplement the farming income, Charlie, as many others in the area, would work in lumber camps in the winter months. Once lumbering had become a way of life for Charlie, he could foresee an opportunity for a profitable business venture. Charlie along with his brother, Pete operated a mill for several years in the 1930's along the Wapiti River south of their farms. Charlie had purchased a mill that had originally operated on the banks of Bear Creek in Grande Prairie. It was probably the remains of the Grande Prairie Planing Mill, owned by H.R. Walker which burnt in August 1932. When crown land became available for timber berths northeast of Crooked Creek, Charlie found an excellent stand of white spruce that had never been ravaged by fire. He had a new sawmill built in Edmonton and moved his operation to the area legally known as N ½ LSD 2 22 71 25 W5 (20 acres). The mill was powered by two steamers, one of which was a 165 Case. He moved in 1940 and started sawing in 1941. In 1946, he entered into a partnership with Hector Morrison of Grande Prairie and formed the "Crooked Creek Lumber Company". The operation soon became known simply as "Moon's Mill".





The mill-site and camp became a small village with twenty-six log cabins for married men and their families, a store complete with gas pumps, a cookhouse, shops and two bunkhouses – one large enough to house twenty men and another smaller one. A large log building was erected which served as a school and dance hall. The aboriginal workers also had a camp of log cabins in an area slightly removed from the other

cabins. Cooks included Ada Bryenton, Rosie Dorscheid, Thelma Ames with her husband, George, fulfilling the “flunky” duties. Pete Doerkson was hired to maintain the livestock; specifically the cows that supplied the fresh dairy products. He also butchered the pigs that the cooks would use for meal preparation and also saw to it that fresh pork was available for sale at the store. Any purchases at the store would be deducted from wages earned. Water for the camp was hauled with horses and a stone boat. Many employees stayed at the camp year around and would continue to saw and pile lumber in the summer. As in any small community, entertainment usually consisted of dances on Saturday nights or alternatively, card parties.



Right – Charlie Moon and Elsie Ames who was employed as the bookkeeper and storekeeper, on the steps of the store. Charlie Ames moved his family to the Mill once he found employment as a steam engineer and eventually spent seven years on location.



In an effort to provide an atmosphere of life whereby employees could bring their families that often consisted of school-age children, Charlie sought the assistance of Stan Hambly, a former school inspector, to see if it would be feasible to provide educational instruction at the mill. A special permit was granted to operate a private school during the winter months. Mrs. Betty Moon was the 1st teacher followed by Mrs. Isobel Moody in September 1948 for one year while Mrs. Moon was on maternity leave. The teacher

often had as many as 20 to 25 pupils receiving instruction at one time. The school opened on November 7, 1947 and operated until June 28, 1952.

The Dorscheid family of Glen Leslie, who had sub-contracted timber from the Crooked Creek Lumber Company, located their mill-site slightly north of Moon's Mill. Their employees' children also attended school at Moon's Mill.

The saw-mill crew consisted of 50% aboriginal workers, mostly skidders and loggers. Some of the employees of the mill itself included sawyers – Vern Sederstrom, Art Loewen, Bill Chapman; boilermen - Pete Wright, Charlie Ames and Otto Miller; canter - Elmer McLaughlin. Emery Parrish hauled logs with a four-up team and sleigh, Paul Diemert and Cliff Loewen skidded the logs with horses. As in any operation there can be serious accidents; Harry Nellis one of the repairman, lost a portion of his arm.



Charlie Moon's house at the Mill – sons Ross & Grant

The Mill operated from 1941 to 1953 and could produce 40,000 FBM per day. They logged in the winter but sawed year-round. The operation had started logging with crosscut saws and horses and ended with power saws, cats and arch trucks.



photo courtesy of Lavina Scott
(Jean Scott in wheel)

By 1945-46, a gas-powered 30 caterpillar hauled the sloops to skid the logs. Donny Norton had two IHC Arch Trucks that skidded from the bush. The Mill operation had a planer-mill but seldom used it. The rough boards were cut three inches thick and then shipped to the Northern Planing Mill in Grande Prairie where they were planed down to two inches.

In 1946, Bickell & Swallow Lumber Company and Crooked Creek Lumber Company formed a new company, Northern Planing Mills and located the business in Grande Prairie at 9649-94 avenue, an area that was next to the Northern Alberta Railway Yard. The location is currently occupied by Prairie Sunrise Towers. Although the operation was very successful with the profits being split proportionately to the volume of lumber supplied, the mill was destroyed by fire in April 1953 and not rebuilt.



Wes Reimer's truck hauling logs to Northern Plywood
photo courtesy of Lavina Scott

In 1952 Hector Morrison and Charlie Moon along with the Bickell's, Roy, Bob, Bill and John incorporated Northern Plywoods Ltd. to produce plywood from poplar logs. Veneer began to be

produced in the spring of 1953, followed by the production of plywood. By now Moon's Mill at Crooked had completed the timber berth requirements stipulated by the Province and essentially closed down. The Scott family, who were operating a mill nearby, lived in the "Moon's Mill Store" the first winter that the building was vacated.

The two steamers that powered the mill were eventually obtained by Stan Reynolds of Wetaskiwin who was collecting period-specific artifacts and equipment for display. He donated his collection to the Province of Alberta who established the Reynolds-Alberta Museum that subsequently opened in 1992.

The September 18, 1952 Herald-Tribune reported:

*Alberta's Only Plywood Factory Locates Here
Sod for a thirty to forty thousand dollar plywood factory was turned at Grande Prairie on Tuesday by officials of Northern Plywoods Ltd. . . . The Company was only recently organized. Major shareholders are all residents of the Peace River Country.*

By 1955, the operation had several hundred employees and an annual payroll running into the millions of dollars with plywood being shipped across Canada and points beyond. Canadian Forest Products Ltd. of Vancouver, BC became interested in the enterprise and bought out Hector Morrison's and Charlie Moon's shares in the Company. The plywood plant was located on Hector Morrison's land, which at that time was quite a distance out of town. Sears and the Real Canadian Superstore (12225 to 12429-99 street, GP) are currently located on the old mill-site.

It was the end of an era for Charlie Moon. An era that was initiated as a small-scale sawmill and ended with the sale of his interest in the only plywood factory in Alberta. He had returned to the farm in Bezanson in 1953 and continued farming until his death in 1967. The community was deeply saddened at the loss of a pioneer who had contributed immensely to the development of the area through his many business ventures.

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Remains of Cookhouse (1977)



Remains of Mill-Site (1977)

References:

- "Smoky to Grande Prairie" History Book
- "My Story" by Roy Bickell
- Ross & Theresa Moon - all photos except for those specifically noted otherwise
- Charlie Wales interview
- "Sawmills: Across the Smoky" History Book
- "Leslie & Morrison Family History" courtesy of Bill Leslie
- Sharon (Moody) Dodd

They Fled Russia to Find Their Peace

The Saint Pokrovsky Old Greek Orthodox Church

Ron Thoreson



A wintery day photo of the Devale Orthodox church from our previous newsletter posed a question about a confusing identity in the early effort to establish that church in 1929. The search for answers led to another wintery scene, shown above, and continues the inspiring stories of survival against great odds.

As a driving force in seeking funds and workers for the Devale project, a church document noted “Fred’ Nasedkin’s work and involvement. However, according to the wife of the youngest son of Peter Nasedkin, the family never included anyone by that name, and Peter himself was undoubtedly that person misidentified.

The families that escaped persecution in Russia via Harbin in 1924 arrived in Canada but endured poor conditions for farming at the original settlement area at Homeglen. As one of a group of families that chose to move further north, Peter Nasedkin moved his family to a homestead in the Spirit River area in 1928, where he was soon working to organize a church.

Other Russian families from Homeglen also chose the Peace region and made a similar new start at the same time near the communities of Hines Creek and Gage. Hit hard by the market

crash in grain prices in 1930, Peter Nasedkin moved his family from his initial homestead near Spirit River to one at Gage, where the community of other Russian-speaking families from Homeglen provided the added support of people who shared a common exodus, faith, and spoken language.

Near Gage was the small town of Hines Creek with a similar number of Russian families who had left Homeglen at the same time. As the two groups of newly arrived settlers became established in the north, the need for a church and a cemetery drove both to plan and begin to build. Cemeteries in both locations were established, but an Old Greek Orthodox church in Gage was never completed.

The St. Pokrovsky Greek Orthodox Church at Hines Creek, on its completion in 1935, served the faithful of both communities, and that history of the Russian emigree group is covered in great detail by Polly Sidoroff Elder in her book *All This Shall Pass*.



The extensive pictorial and print article by Glen Bowe in collaboration with Polly, with excerpts from her book and detailed references, grew from his passion for photography, followed by researching the stories behind structures he has found in the lesser-traveled byways of western Canada. For continuity, open and enjoy his article with this link [A Very Unusual Church – Glen's Travels \(home.blog\)](#)

The church was a proud achievement of the Hines Creek families, though a year late to serve as a location for the 1934 triple wedding of three Nasedkin daughters to sons of three Russian families. Held in the largest family home available, the celebration lasted for a week.

The last wedding ceremony held in the church was in 1946, with the double wedding of Victor Nasedkin to Jenny Polukoshko, and Zoya Nasedkin to Nick Andruff. During and after WWII, the sons and daughters of the older generation continued to seek their fortunes in a variety of occupations and often distant locations that left the church with vastly decreased numbers in the congregation.

At the wedding, Peter presented his youngest son Victor with the ornate inscribed brass cross pictured, and it remains with the family. Brought from Russia, Peter may have hoped it would be placed in a church in Gage, but that building was never realized. The cross was of a size that would be used in the Old Greek Orthodox ceremony



of The Exaltation of the Holy Cross, each September 14th.

An inscription on the back of the cross, in Old Church Slavonic characters, is a hymn of early Greek origin that proclaims and celebrates:
*The Cross - protector of the whole world,
The Cross - beauty of the Church,
The Cross - ruler of states,
The Cross - glory of angels,
The Cross - plague of demons,
The Cross - establisher of the faithful.*

For a very short (1minute 40 seconds) view of portions of such a ceremony using still photos accompanied by some audio of the hymn, there is an example here: [Exaltation of the Holy Cross](#)

Sometimes our study of the history of a place, a family, and a people is overtaken by events that affect not just those currently living, but generations yet to come. The misfortune of those forced by circumstances to flee their homeland is sometimes doubled, when their language and customs become suspect in their new land of refuge. Though victims of a force that oppressed them, they can often be mistakenly identified as being allied with their abusers when in their new host country, especially when there is active conflict.

In the early years, many settlers in our region came from eastern Europe. These included areas where the Russian language was mandated, a result of shifting national borders, or part of early

religious rituals. Others came from central Russia itself, but that did not in any way ally them with a Bolshevik regime that was dispossessing, imprisoning, or executing people. They chose to flee to save their families, and our country is made stronger by their courage.

Those of us in current generations, whose forbearers fled to safety from similar circumstances, can repay our debt to them and honour their memory by never confusing the identity of true victims with their abusers. Not recognizing the difference can cause needless conflict within a community.

Studying the history of a century past will help us understand the present, as an important struggle is again upon us with the mass exodus of families from conflict zones in the present day. While some may say this is history repeating itself, it may have been better summarized by author William Faulkner's observation, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

Sources:

Photos: Ron Thoreson, Church in winter, courtesy Tom and Jean Sideroff; cross views, courtesy of Jenny Nasedkin
All This Shall Pass, Polly Elder, and family assistance gratefully acknowledged

Inscription translation: members, Omniglot online language resource community

Glen Bowe: photographer, researcher, and blog author: A Very Unusual Church, with listed references within the blog post, and photos with watermark identification