



Promoting, Preserving, Publishing Our Heritage



This mural based on the painting, "Indians Crossing Nose Mountain" by Euphemia (Betty) McNaught, was created in 1990-1 by Jean Wagner, Darlene Dautel, and the Beaverlodge Mural Society. This mural is displayed on the south side of the IGA building in Beaverlodge.

Upcoming Winter/Spring Events

(Full Details will be posted on our Facebook Forum Page)

Additional podcasts for Winter/Spring are also in the works!

Our first video podcast on historic major fires from our region is complete, and a second is almost finalized for uploading (with even more to come). Our YouTube channel is up at

[The Peace Country Historical Society Podcast - YouTube](#)

and is part of our new service from Google Workspace for Nonprofits, allowing better communications and related services. After some delays with this newsletter, some further announcements may also follow by members' email, and for the wider public on our [PCHS Forum | Facebook](#) page.

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

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Get in the game...

Contact us early with a submission idea for the Spring Edition of our PCHS newsletter!

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What We Can Offer

- A chance to help set the 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 preservation of the history of our area.
- Qualify to submit applications for HSA grants to fund special projects.
- We hope you choose to continue with, or to join our Society.

Why your membership matters:

A Timely Message from the Historical Society of Alberta

Every year between January 1 and March 31, the Historical Society of Alberta (H.S.A.) runs its annual membership drive, encouraging its present members to renew and inviting all Albertans to join as members and subscribers.

This Historical Society of Alberta, formed by an act of the province in 1907, is tasked with the job of documenting, preserving, and presenting the histories of Alberta, its people, its communities, organizations, and the events that have helped shape and create the province we are today.

These are exciting times for history. Now more than ever we are all asking: How did we get here? Where are we going? Whose stories and voices are being told and how? Are we ensuring that history is being told from multiple perspectives and includes everyone's stories? Be a part of this conversation and help determine how the province's stories are told by becoming a member today!

As a member of the Historical Society of Alberta and its chapters, (such as PCHS), members may receive the Alberta History magazines, the society newsletters, and be included in invitations to programs and events. Members are also eligible to apply for the H.S.A. grants that support historians and organizations in researching and telling Alberta's history. As well, members may choose to volunteer or write and share their stories and research with their fellow Albertans.

Whether your passion is advocating for Alberta's built heritage or learning about the diverse histories and stories of Alberta and its communities, there is a place for you at the Historical Society of Alberta.

"Our members research and tell the inspiring stories of Albertans in an informative and fun way. Join us and help us bring our fascinating history to life," said Walt DeBoni, Vice President of H.S.A. "It may inspire you to explore your own family history."

The membership year for the Historical Society of Alberta is April 1 to March 31. Readers wanting more information or wishing to join the Historical Society of Alberta can do so by visiting the Historical Society of Alberta website at: <https://www.albertahistory.org>

Renewals before February 29 will be entered in an HSA draw for a free membership the following year.

Join now and get three months as an extension of your new annual membership, and a draw entry.

A Unique PCHS Membership Offer for You and Your Friends!

To encourage renewal and new membership in the PCHS region, there will be a drawing for five standard resetting and leveling projects for family historical markers in the coming season, courtesy of Plumb Level Heritage Preservation Ltd. If your family markers are perfect and upright, you may be able to direct that preservation help to a friend or even a neglected local historical person's marker. While more memberships will increase the odds, they start at better than one in 10, so tell your historically-minded friends. **It all starts with your PCHS chapter membership!** Email the **Editor** for further details.

Rutabaga Johnson

Based on a 1908 photo of Oliver "Rutabaga" Johnson, the mural painting by Canadian Award-winning artist Suzanne Sandboe, is boldly displayed on the Arcand-White Accounting building in downtown Beaverlodge. Oliver Johnson was one of the first three settlers in the Beaverlodge Valley homesteading along the Beaverlodge River, where he grew the pictured monstrous crop of rutabagas that earned him the nickname "Rutabaga".



Putting history on display: The Beaverlodge Mural Foundation



Edson Trail Days

Beaverlodge artists Toni Schuler and Vicki Hotte created the outline of "Edson Trail Days" by Euphemia (Betty) McNaught in 1927, as part of the Beaverlodge 100 Year Celebration. Once the outline was complete, Beaverlodge residents were invited to paint the mural. The finished mural was auctioned off and Mick Walker of ACE Hardware was the successful bidder and he had the mural installed on the ACE Hardware building where it is proudly displayed today.

Norwegian Ski Jumping

Pat Wearmouth



Imagine yourself on a winter's day, standing on the platform of a ski jump tower 75 feet above the ground. On your feet is a pair of skis made from birch boards held on by leather straps. In front of you is a long descending ramp which ends in an upturn that will throw you into the air above the bank of a creek. Then gravity will take over and bring you back to earth. Ski jump tower at the top of the hill.

Ski jump tower at the top of the hill.



You land, hopefully, on a bank of the creek that is steep enough to let you carry on at speed. You don't want to stop too abruptly. That will hurt. But eventually, the ground will flatten to a runout, and you come to a stop. You have just ski jumped. The distance from the end of the ramp to where your skis landed is your score.

The bottom of the hill, showing the ramp, the landing space, and the flat runout. Note also, the jumper in the air, and the spectators

It could have been you, if you had been around in the winter of 1918/1919. You would have been on the bank of Bear Creek to the north of what now is the Emerson Trail (Hwy #672). The Norwegian community in the area built the tower to pursue this popular sport. The jump was one of several built in the region in the early 20th century.

Ski jumping originated in Norway. Olaf Rye, a lieutenant in the Norwegian military, made one of the first jumps in 1808. He did so to illustrate the idea of courage to his soldiers. Jumping grew from there, alongside the much older cross-country skiing, as a distinctly Nordic sport. As Norwegians left the country to settle in other parts of the world, they took their ski jumping with them.

In Canada, a Norwegian named Nels Nelson introduced ski jumping in a major way, by building a jump near Revelstoke, B.C. in 1915. He used the natural geographical features of a mountain to get the height needed. It was the biggest natural ski jump hill in Canada and was internationally recognized as one of the best in North America. From there, the sport moved across the country. The tower on Bear Creek was one of many built on the Prairies, where few hills gave the height needed.

In 1925, the LaGlance/Valhalla people formed “The Northern Ski Club” to encourage ski jumping. Many members had learned their jumping skills in Norway and passed them on to friends and neighbours. Club skiers traveled to other places to attend competitions at the club’s expense. Grande Prairie was one destination, and members often used horses to travel there. Club records showed that livery costs for the horses were often more than the hotel bill for competitors. The Grande Prairie ski jump site is still visible from the walking trails that run along Bear Creek in *Muskoseepi Park*.

More distant competitions included Edmonton, and perhaps the Norwegian settlements around Camrose.

The competitions were not just for the ski jumpers. The events were important social occasions for both the athletes and spectators. People could visit with others while watching the jumps or gathering around a warming fire to break the grind of pioneer life.

Since its humble beginnings, ski jumping has risen to become an international sport and a part of the Winter Olympics. Olaf Rye jumped 31 feet in 1808. Currently, the record stands at 831 feet. Fittingly, that jump, made by an Austrian, happened in Norway. The increased distances result from technology and technique improvements. They are so dramatic that some have called the sport ski flying rather than jump



It is difficult to know when the ski jump tower came to its end. Relatively soon after construction, a windstorm blew off the top 25 feet of the tower. It continued, however, to serve its purpose, until its eventual demise. Now the tower site is just an open area covered in grass and shrubs at the top of the bank of Bear Creek. No remnants of the scaffolding remain.

Gerri Edgar points to the tower site



**The ramp, the landing point, and the runout,
are now barely seen through the trees.**

You can also see the path of the descending ramp and the run out onto the flats of the jump. It is the opening shown in the middle of the photo, barely discernable between the trees. The landing part of the slope is about three-quarters of the way down.

Perhaps you can also hear the cheers from the crowd as the skiers made their jumps.

References sourced:

- Lance, Trudy, and Gerri Edgar: personal communication
- The Twilight Club History Book Committee, La Glass Yesterday and Today, Friesen Printers 1981
- Wikipedia
- Photos by the author and La Glass Yesterday and Today

An Update on the Old Bezanson Archaeology Project

Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown, Athabasca University
Shawn Morton, Northwestern Polytechnic

In the September 2022 issue of the Peace Country Historical Society newsletter, we reported on our 2022 field season at the Old Bezanson Townsite (OBT). Here, we present an update on our team's ongoing efforts to better understand the lifeways of settlers at the OBT. In July 2023, we began excavations at the Hall & Leonard Store. Mary Nutting (2013) noted that although the South Peace region had many general stores, little information exists about the early stores beyond photographs and occasional counter slips in personal collections. She called on scholars to find more evidence of general stores to shed light on the history of rural communities. Archaeology can play a crucial role in uncovering such evidence.

General Stores

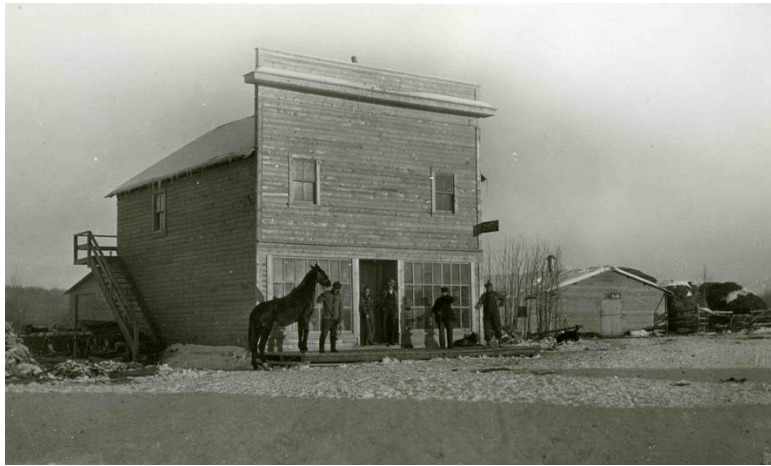
General stores were standard components of frontier material-culture complexes of early settler communities. They can provide valuable insight into the lifeways of the time. These stores, also known as "basic provision stores" or "commodious stores," sold various merchandise, including canned and dry goods, clothing, tools, furniture, and medicine. Proprietors relied on predictable transportation to keep their shelves stocked. Any disruption was terrible news for business owners and clients. As populations grew, so did competition, with multiple general stores appearing over time. Storekeepers were often among the wealthy and influential members of the community, extending their influence through multiple related jobs, including postmaster, pharmacist, and more.

The Hall & Leonard Store

The Hall & Leonard Store was one of the first stores at the OBT, built in 1914 and opening in December. The store's proprietors were H. F. Hall and W. A. Leonard of Edmonton, whose arrivals to, duration at, activities within, and departure from the OBT were roughly chronicled in the pages of the Grande Prairie Herald. A photo from the South Peace Regional Archives shows the store as a two-story building with a distinct false front façade and a set of external stairs, making it easily recognizable in other photos. False fronts are standard features of commercial structures in frontier settler towns—designed to create an impression of grandeur and spaciousness. The store itself would have been on the ground level, and the upstairs would have typically served as a residence—permanent or temporary (e.g., boarding rooms).

Starting in 1915, the Peterson store (variously referred to as a "general store" and a "hardware and furniture store") also appeared, as did additional specialty shops, adding to the competition. Hall & Leonard's version of their store seems to have survived less than a year, with both proprietors moving to Grande Prairie by the end of 1915 and 1916, respectively. It is unclear what the store building functioned as after this time, but it's worth noting that it still stood in 1920, as seen in the background of a photo of a neighbouring store. It may have

remained a store after it was no longer associated with Hall and Leonard. It likely continued to function as a residence or even a dancehall at one point, similar to the Peterson store.



SPRA 1990.30.066 "Leonard's first store at Bezanson. 1914." Permission to reproduce granted by the South Peace Regional Archives.

Our Season

Our 2023 field season stretched over 22 days in July and August 2023. It included the two of us, two student research assistants, and 20 volunteers (aged 8 and above). Today, what remains can be found right in the main day-use area of the park. You can see a roughly rectangular cellar pit, oriented north-south, at the surface, matching the town grid. The cellar is surrounded by hummocks/mounds. In all, we excavated ~27 m² in the NW portion of the building site, revealing previously unrecorded structural details of the building area and associated lot yard.

Unsurprisingly, we confirmed that the cellar--which was situated below the building--was excavated using shovels and picks, evidenced by chipped-stone flakes, the product of tool strikes on excavated glaciofluvial rock material. The dirt and rocks removed created the foundation berm and various piles around the yard. Based on the low berm, the building's estimated size is 6 m x 9 m, or 20 ft x 30 ft. This is similar in size to an earlier building mentioned in the *Grande Prairie Herald* owned by A. D. Berry, which has not been identified on the ground. Perhaps this was purchased by Hall & Leonard later that year? It is about half the size of the Peterson Store (30 x 60 ft). Unlike at Bezanson's house, we found few items in this area, beneath where the main floor of the building would have been. Is this reflective of use? Tighter flooring?

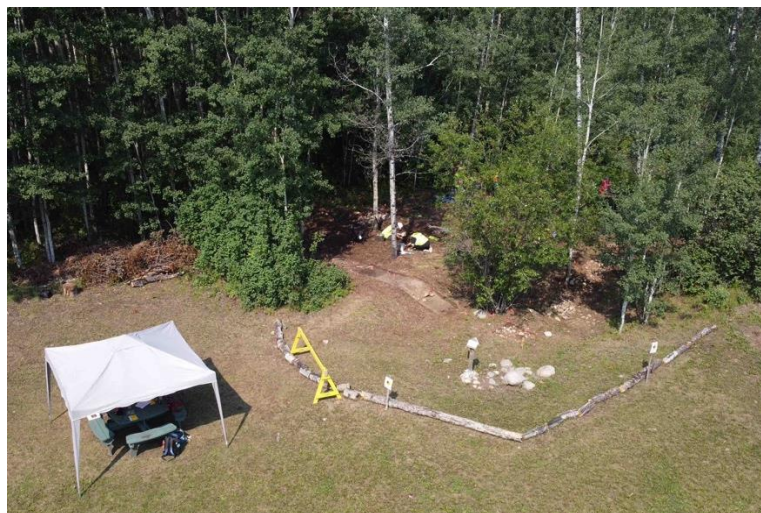
An exciting discovery was a sheet midden just to the NE of the building. Here, bottles, cans, and other items were added to the usual complement of broken window glass and nails recovered around the store yard. Our ability to stylistically date some of the artifacts confirms that some of the material, at least, is from the time after the store (if it did indeed close in 1915—we're still researching this and would love any assistance from those of you more familiar with the local historical record).

Materials recovered in our excavations are beginning to shed light on residents' economic networks. The presence of many glass beer bottles suggests residents had direct or

indirect ties to the north-central US. The manufacturers' marks on the bottles link many of them to the Adolphus Busch Glass Manufacturing Company (later American Bottle Company) and the William Frazen & Sons factories. Both companies specialized in beer bottles, with the former producing Budweiser. The fact that Alberta was under prohibition from 1916 to 1923 opens the door to possible discussions surrounding smuggling or bootlegging associated with the townsite during that period. Pottery from England and Europe highlights other aspects of economic networks. Identifiable pieces include a scalloped-edge, green-transfer-print earthenwares with the "Imperial" pattern, produced by J.H. Weatherby & Sons of Hanley, England, and boasting a maker's mark from 1892-1925. Porcelain, likely from Limoges, France, was also identified.

Other topics we're continuing to investigate include foodways, personal care, and energy issues. We've recovered many key-wind potted meat tins and tapered sardine tins. We've also found distinctive (and temporally diagnostic) evaporated milk cans, a Magic Baking Powder can, and more. These findings can provide insight into diet and food preparation methods. Personal care items include glass medicine bottles, pieces of decorative "dainty" vessels, and silvered glass mirror shards. The latter is rarely identified archaeologically due to surface preservation issues. Lastly, we recovered a piece of coal in the sheet midden, which can provide clues about energy generation and consumption at the townsite, used for heating, operating machinery, etc. As to its source, one finds ads in the local newspaper for various mines around the region, and the local Smoky River derives its name from Indigenous observations of smouldering coal beds.

During the final week of our season, we made a significant discovery, adding a new temporal dimension to our multi-component site. Our findings indicate evidence of a third occupation or use period at the townsite. As reported in our 2022 newsletter, we previously uncovered evidence of a very early Indigenous component predating the settlers. Now, we have discovered evidence of a late fur trade era component dating to the 1800s. We found a musket ball in the layer immediately below the settler store level. In addition, while washing artifacts in the lab, we identified an exhausted gun flint. These findings, and those from 2022, open additional avenues for future research and emphasize the more complex history of the townsite locale than appears in existing narratives.



Excavations at the Hall & Leonard Store site. Drone photo by S. Morton.

Future Plans

We'll take a break from fieldwork in 2024 to continue with artifact analyses, finish writing reports and other items from the past three field seasons, and apply for future funding. We always need help with various tasks, so if you are interested, don't hesitate to contact us at obaparky@gmail.com.

We thank the Historical Society of Alberta/Peace Country Historical Society for giving us a small grant to hire two local student research assistants during our 2023 field season at the townsite.

Citations

Nutting, Mary (2013). "The Country General Store." *Telling our Stories* 4(2):3.

Another editor note:

An unusual "Norwegian" connection led to my choice of the Raft Baby (below) to the attention of some "younger" folks in our community. Many, like myself, had never heard of this remarkable story. I didn't just stumble on it locally, though. Having renewed contact with elderly relatives in Minnesota, their son's Facebook page had the story of 3 seniors (aged 65 to 72) who rode their snowmobiles 8,000 km from Minnesota to Alaska in about six weeks.

That story of "Three Old Guys" referenced their contact with Blair Jean, a retired trapper and author/historian from the Fort Mac area. He had reposted the Raft Baby story in a timeline format on his Facebook page July 26, 2023 "for residents of the Peace." His interests are mostly in NE Alberta (and further north), the early explorers, fur traders, and people of that region. It was a long digital trip to find this story's origins that had been residing just 20 miles from home!

The Raft Baby of the Peace River

Trapper Blackfoot Jean had been paddling upriver all morning and he was ready for a break. His mission on the Peace River that late spring morning in 1872 was two-fold; he was looking for beaver sign and he hoped to meet his sister and her husband, Edward Armson, heading downstream with their fur catch from their winter trapline somewhere up the south Pine River in British Columbia. Seeing an open spot on the left bank, Jean turned his dugout canoe toward it, and soon had water for tea boiling merrily. As he reached out to dump a handful of tea into the pot, his hand stopped in mid-air. Upstream he spotted what looked like a raft of some sort with a red rag on a stick waving over it. Intrigued, he hastily put the tea back in its container, pushed his canoe into the river and swiftly paddled out to intercept.



Photo courtesy of South Peace Regional Archives

As he drew near he saw it was a raft, right enough. Moreover, it carried a strange cargo – wrapped in a blanket was a tiny baby, obviously more dead than alive. Thus began an 18-year sequence of tragedy, mystery, and amazing coincidence.

For instance, as Jean picked up the nearly dead baby, he had no way of knowing that it was his niece, or at that moment his sister whom he had hoped to meet was trying to comfort her dying husband and was herself dying of starvation as she knelt beside him.

Eighteen years later when their remains were discovered the raft baby was a beautiful young woman about to be married.

Unknown to anyone, however, was the fact that her fiancé was a close relative. Only the discovery of a diary with the Armson's remains prevented another tragedy. It revealed that Edward Armson was the father of both.

But as he paddled shoreward with the starved child, Trapper Jean was more concerned with saving her life than with wondering who she was. Once ashore he quickly dressed a mallard duck he shot that morning and dropped it into the water he had boiled for tea. When it appeared done enough, he clumsily set about getting the baby, a girl he estimated to be two months old, to swallow some of the broth. To his surprise she accepted each spoonful greedily, indicating with tiny whimpers she wanted more. Jean remembered that earlier that morning he had passed a Beaver Indian encampment downstream a ways. So when the infant seemed sufficiently recuperated to travel, he took her aboard his canoe and set off. Fortunately, the Beaver encampment was still there. Moreover, a young mother willingly took the emaciated infant and began to nurse her. With the little one in good hands, Jean could do no more. He thanked them and continued on upriver. But not before an older woman pointed out to him a scar on the baby's left foot, which she said was "older than the baby".

The summer before Jean's startling discovery, Edward Armson, an Englishman, along with such well-known characters as Nigger Dan Williams, Twelve-Foot Davis and others, had been seeking gold along the river near Fort St. John. Armson had come to the Peace with his Blackfoot wife from diggings along the North Saskatchewan River. Mrs. Armson was a beautiful woman said to have but one physical imperfection – a vivid scar on the second toe of her left foot she had inflicted on herself while splitting wood in the Fort St. John mining camp.

Toward fall the gold sands near Fort St. John began to peter out and the miners began an exodus to more lucrative locations. Armson and his wife were among the first to leave, stating that they planned to spend the winter trapping along the South Pine River. In the spring, they said, they intended to return to the North Saskatchewan River via the Peace, Lesser Slave, and the Athabasca River. That was the last anyone saw of the Armsons while they were alive.

Seven years later (1879) the Reverend C. Garrioch, Anglican missionary to the Peace River country from the 1870s to the 1890s, was on his way to Montreal. Sent by his superior, Bishop William Bompas, on a combination holiday/business trip, he was to acquire supplies for the Unjaga Mission he had established on the Peace River, a couple of miles upstream from Fort Vermillion. Bishop Bompas had also asked him to try to locate a farmer interested in starting a mission farm at Fort Dunvegan, also on the Peace, some 300 miles upstream.

On the stage run from Winnipeg to St. Paul, Minnesota (the C.P.R. through Northern Ontario hadn't yet been built), Rev. Garrioch met a young couple named Vining who invited him to stay a few days with them as their hotel guest in St. Paul. He accepted, and while there learned that Mrs. Vining was Canadian. He also learned that their pretty, olive-skinned daughter, Lily, was not their progeny. They had adopted her from a free-trader who said he had got her from an Indian family while trading along the Peace River.

Garrioch could not help wondering at the identity of the little girl, but in the course of his travels she all but slipped from his mind.

On his way back from Montreal the following spring, Rev. Garrioch stopped to visit in Winnipeg at the house where he was born. He was pleasantly surprised when he got there to learn that his brother, George, and his wife were willing to accompany him to Dunvegan to attempt setting up a mission farm. A short time later they set out by Red River cart for Edmonton.



Photo courtesy of South Peace Regional Archives

In Edmonton, the Garrioch brothers were joined by none other than Blackfoot Jean. He was to guide them through the vast stretch of wilderness on the two-month trek to Dunvegan. While on the trail Jean told the Garriochs his fascinating story of finding the baby floating down the Peace. He also told of the Armsons' disappearance. He often wondered about the baby, whether she might be his sister's, and asked Rev. Garrioch if he would make some inquiries when he got back to the Peace.

By then Garrioch was sufficiently intrigued by the story that he hardly needed Jean's urging to make some inquiries. Could there, he wondered, be a connection between the Vining's lovely daughter and the raft baby? It seemed there might. However, it wasn't until the summer of 1881 while on a trip to Edmonton to acquire some cattle for the Dunvegan mission farm that he had a chance to make some earnest queries.

On the cattle drive back to the Peace, Garrioch's two hired assistants, Peter Ward and Louis Sizerman, both of Indian-white extraction, told of their having heard of the raft baby. As Sizerman was familiar with the country where the Armsons supposedly had wintered Garrioch asked him to watch for clues that might lead to the Armson winter residence. Sizerman promised to do better than that – he would try to solve the whole mystery. He did, too, but it took him almost 10 years.

Meanwhile, Rev. Garrioch accumulated enough evidence to establish Lily Vining as the raft baby beyond doubt. Before leaving Edmonton with Ward and Sizerman, Garrioch had talked with the Vinings who were visiting there at the time. He learned that Lily had a birthmark on her left foot that resembled a wound made by a sharp implement. Later, while rafting down the Peace from Fort Dunvegan to Fort Vermillion, Garrioch was accompanied by a young Welshman named Valentine James who had worked for Twelve-Foot Davis at his Peace River Landing trading post. James, it turned out, had been at the Fort St. John mining camp in 1870 and '71 and knew the Armsons well.

When camp broke up that fall of '71, he had moved to the coast and hadn't heard of the Armsons' disappearance until 4 years later. Later still, he also heard the raft baby story and when he did, he remembered that while he and a partner were searching for gold along the Finlay River some 4 years after leaving Fort St. John, they had seen a little girl about 3 years old of mixed white and Indian blood with a Beaver Indian family. They told James they got her from a Blackfoot trapper on the Oonchaga (Beaver name for Peace) on the east side of the Rocky Mountains. The family was to meet a trader named Nelson, who was going to adopt the little girl and pay them for having raised her.

Garrioch later learned from a Mr. Elmore, a trader acquainted with both James and Nelson that Nelson did pick up the little girl and took her to his wife in Victoria who was unable to have children of her own. Twelve-foot Davis also knew the Nelsons well and he told Garrioch that because Mrs. Nelson was not well, the Nelsons moved to Calgary, hoping a change of climate would help. Mrs. Nelson, however, died in Calgary and Nelson then moved back to Victoria. But before he did, he turned over the little girl to a childless couple then living in Edmonton. Later while on his way to England, Garrioch again visited the Vinings and they quickly corroborated that the free trader they had received Lily from was named Nelson. Moreover, they told

Garrioch they'd known the Nelsons for several months in Calgary before Mrs. Nelson died.

If by then Lily Vining was pretty firmly established as the raft baby, the dogged work of Louis Sizerman finally established her true identity and explained the mysterious disappearance of the Armsons. From time to time Sizerman had reported his progress to Garrioch. The first time he visited the area, he found where the Armsons had trapped that winter of '71 – '72. On his next two trips through, he established the length and breadth of their trapline but he was unable to locate their cabin. Each time he was in the area he continued to look for it and finally in 1890 his perseverance paid off.

He found the cabin almost completely hidden from view by a huge pine that had blown down many years before, crushing the roof. The dwelling consisted of a 12 by 14 foot excavation in a steep clay bank, fronted by a sturdy wall of spruce logs.

As it turned out, the fallen tree that made the cabin so hard to find preserved its contents from prowling animals. It took some hard digging for Sizerman to clear away the debris and enter the cabin. When he did, in the dim light filtering into the once snug quarters, a grisly sight lay before him. On a makeshift bed against the back wall lay the bones of a man, while in a kneeling position beside the bed was a skeleton of a woman. A second glance revealed a shattered gun and part of the man's left hand was missing. Sizerman also noted a baby's rattle and bottle, but no baby skeleton.

From Sizerman's observations and from a package wrapped in birch bark and containing a diary and a Bible he'd found suspended from a ceiling joist, Garrioch and his friend were able to reconstruct what had taken place. The Armsons had worked together to build a warm and comfortable dwelling. Trapping must have been good for many mink, marten, fox, and beaver pelts lay molding about.

According to the diary baby girl had been born in the spring for Armson had written: "Born this day, March 31, a girl with vocal cords in fine working order. It would seem that when Mrs. Armson hit her toe in the St. John's mining camp, she inflicted a hatchet mark in duplicate; for on the corresponding toe of her daughter's foot there is a perfect replica of the scar on hers."

About a month after the baby was born, tragedy struck. Somehow Armson's rifle exploded, blowing off part of his hand. Worse, infection set in and he was no longer able to hunt. Mrs. Armson's attempts at filling the larder met with little success and the family began to starve. When the situation began to appear hopeless, Mr. Armson carried the baby to the Pine River, built a small raft (their dugout canoe had been stove in, Sizerman noted), tied a red rag to a stick then pushed the raft and its passenger into the current. Then Mrs. Armson returned to the cabin to await death beside her husband.

The last entry in the diary was to save the Armson family from yet another tragedy. It stated: "May 15 1872: I am dying effects of accident. My first wife died in England, leaving son now five. Write Barstow and Blake, Solicitors, London, England. Wife and baby weak from starvation. The Lord will Provide."

As soon as he was able, Rev Garrioch turned the diary over to the Vining family, then living in Calgary. In an attempt to learn more about Lily's half-brother the Vinings wired the London solicitors mentioned in the diary. Lily, now a grown woman of 19, was engaged to a young man named Herbert Melvin not long over from England.

Lily, her fiancé and her adopted parents were shocked by the reply telegram from Barstow and Blake: "ARMSON'S SON ADOPTED BY HIS OLDEST SISTER. SON'S NAME NOW HERBERT MELVIN."

By some strange miracle, Armson's diary had reached out over the years to prevent his daughter from marrying her half-brother!

Thus the 18-year sequence of tragedy, mystery, and coincidence came to a close – a saga difficult to believe, but well documented.

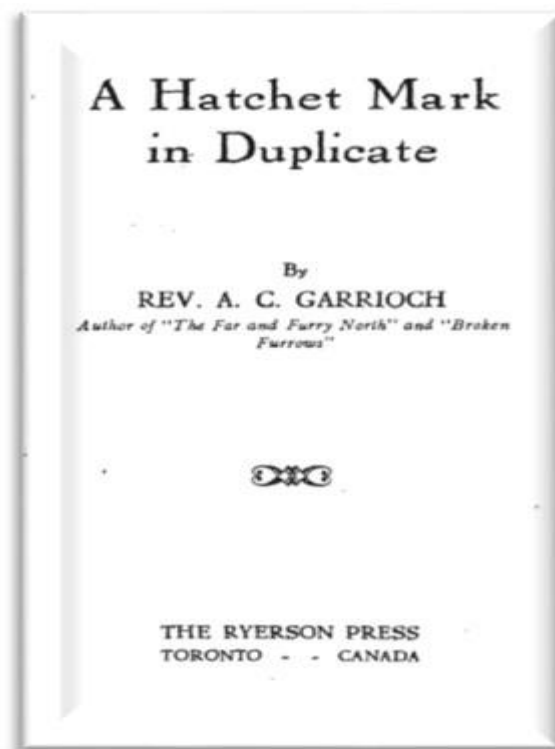


Photo courtesy of South Peace Regional Archives

Editor's Note: On a recent visit to the Vancouver Public Library, I was able to quickly skim through Rev Garrioch's *Hatchet Mark in Duplicate* and found the following information we genealogists need to know:

- Mr. Armson's first marriage was in England in 1866. His son was born in 1867. Two years later, Mrs. Armson died, and shortly after Mr. Armson entrusted his son to the care of the elderly sister of his deceased wife, and promptly left for Canada. He wrote to England from Montreal a few months later. Early in 1871, he wrote a second letter this time from Saskatchewan. He had remarried and was heading for the Peace River country. Relatives in England never heard from him again.

- The Vinings were well known in Calgary, and were involved with the Anglican Church and the Hudson's Bay Company. Lily, about a year later, married Gerald Clive.

- Herbert had been adopted by his aunt when he was made her heir. Herbert was also subsequently married. His bride was an Englishwoman new to North America.

Harold Fryer

Note: This story was found in the files at the Grande Prairie Museum. The main source for the story was the book *Hatchet Mark in Duplicate* by Rev. Garrioch, printed by Ryerson Press, Toronto Canada in 1929.

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Heritage Seekers

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PCHS Editor's Note:

We are re-printing this remarkable tale of Peace Country history with the generous permission of the Grande Prairie and District Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society. It is sourced from their quarterly publication *Heritage Seekers* as noted above. It represents the complementary work that organizations and their members have done to bring the stories of our early history to life again for the enjoyment of current generations.

Whether it is PCHS, the Alberta Genealogical Society, the South Peace Regional Archive, or your local museum as part of the Spirit of the Peace Museums Network, your **active and supporting memberships** help our stories survive for future generations.

Perhaps Louis Sizerman should be named a posthumous honorary member of each group!

A CHRISTMAS DINNER - EIGHTY YEARS AGO

WEST SMOKY LEGION No. 244

brings you

A Christmas to Remember

December 25, 1943, Christmas in Ortona, Italy

*written by Wanda Zenner
December 2023*



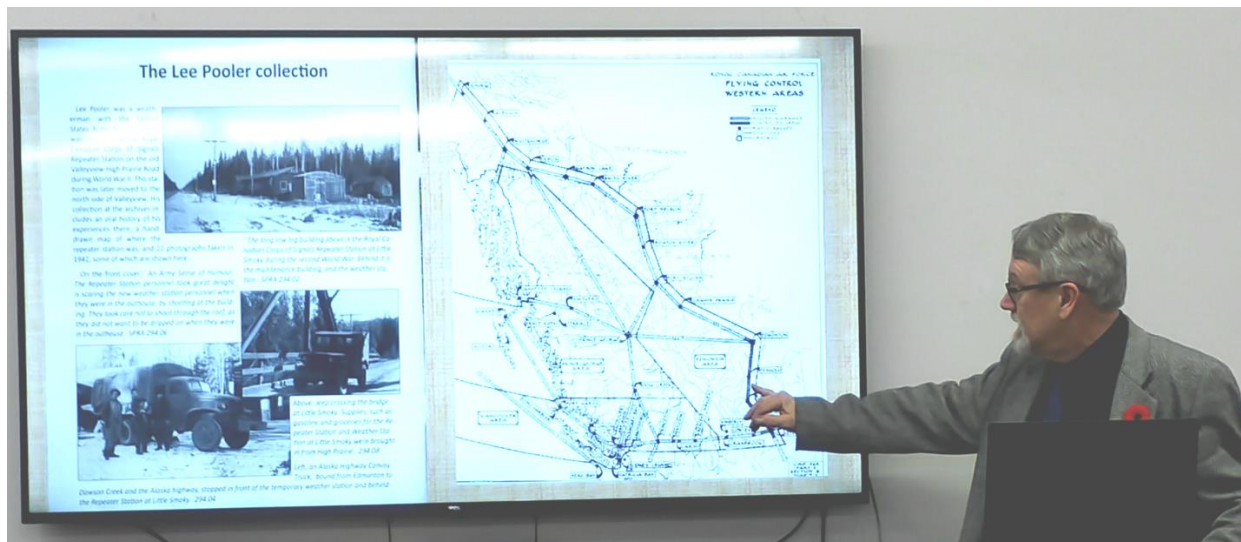
Members of the Seaforth Highlanders gathered in shifts for a Christmas dinner in a bombed-out Church at Santa Maria di Constantinopoli, a few blocks from the fighting. Essentials had been scrounged for the special meal - table cloths, chinaware, beer, wine, roast pork, applesauce, cauliflower, mashed potatoes, gravy, chocolate, oranges, nuts, and cigarettes. While an organist played "**Silent Night**", the soldiers were able to sing

these words against the backdrop of a raging war. However, their shifts were quickly over and they had to return to the fighting. For some, it would be their last meal.

The Germans withdrew two days after Christmas. The Canadians achieved their objective, but at great cost. Ortona had been liberated but the month that would go down in history as "**Bloody December**." It was the bloodiest month of war in the Italian Campaign. A terrible price was paid by the Canadians during that Christmas in hell. The losses suffered by the Canadians at Ortona were nearly one quarter of their total casualties in the entire Italian Campaign.

During the Italian Campaign, we lost two servicemen from our area, both being buried at the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery in Italy. Sergeant Paul Smashnuk was killed in action on November 24, 1943 and on December 16, 1943 Lance Corporal Jock Purves was killed in action near San Leonardo. Both left behind a wife and young child.

A Remembrance Event



Our November 8th Remembrance Event at the Grande Prairie Museum was not just a reminder of the sacrifices made by those resident settlers of the Peace who enlisted for Canadian military service. Farmers and family members also provided vital support with food and materiel from the home front for the war effort. An engaging audience discussion followed Duff Crerar's presentation.

November 8th was also the day for the recognition of National Indigenous Veterans Day (also known as National Aboriginal Veterans Day). It is a Memorial Day observed in Canada for aboriginal contributions to military service, particularly in the First and Second World Wars and Korea. It occurs annually on 8 November. The day was first commemorated nationally in 1994. The Peace region Indigenous community likewise had many individuals who served or otherwise supported Canada's war effort.

We were pleased to have in our audience Ms. Randi Gage of Manitoba, (on far right below) a veteran, former MLA, and one of the Founding Officers of the National Aboriginal Veterans Association. She was in town to host an earlier Women's Ceremony at the Veterans Memorial Gardens & Interpretive Centre.



Scrooge and the Grinch both had a change of Heart for Christmas!

The Grande Prairie Generations Readers Theatre entertained us with a light-hearted selection of Christmas-themed performances on December 10th in full dress. We are working to put the link up for viewing when the production can be trimmed for glitches and edited for sound quality. In the meantime, we pulled some cameo shots for you from the video.

Performances from a Dickens Christmas Story, to the Grinch's schemes, a Ukrainian farmer's rendition of the 12 Days (setting his tuning with a "pitch" fork), a soldier's letter home, and more favourites filled the playbill.



