



Promoting, Preserving, Publishing Our Heritage



The Wild Rose, our Alberta provincial floral emblem is a perfect backdrop for long-awaited spring news!

Upcoming Events – see details on [PCHS Forum](#) | [Facebook](#)

Additional podcasts have been added for your enjoyment! Recent additions include the two episode visit with Marv Moore, and the Danny Rycroft story. Two earlier archived episodes were added on the local Cold War experience, and the history of the Grande Prairie Royal Air Cadet Squadron. Bookmark our YouTube channel and enjoy it at [The Peace Country Historical Society Podcast - YouTube](#). The [PCHS Podcast Archive](#) page on our website will have added written introductions to help viewers choose their subjects of interest.

2026 Events will be emailed to members and posted on [the PCHS Forum](#) | [Facebook](#) page.

More details will be added as planning and participants are confirmed.

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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PCHS Events Planning
Wanda Zenner—Generations Readers Theatre
Liaison

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What We Can Offer

A chance to help set the direction for our Peace Country Chapter at membership meetings or 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 join, or continue with our Society.

Editor's Message

Charting a Path Forward in Our 120th Year

As an explanation for the until-now missing Spring Newsletter, all of our Chapter members - and the entire membership of the Historical Society of Alberta - have been awaiting a review by the provincial administration on their budget that removed our operational funding for all future years going forward.

The decision allowing a modest reprieve is welcome, even if it still disappears in stages over three years. It provides an interval in which HSA can work to develop alternate methods to replace critically necessary and reliable operational funding.

No operating society can do forward planning when using only year-to-year unreliable Project Grant funding. Vital society Operating Grant funds are no longer available under provincial programs that remain, and even project funding is typically oversubscribed. Often, even approved Project Grants are thus awarded a diminishing share or percentage of a capital fund pool that may not even exist in the future.

After your advocacy for the importance of history for our members and many supporting Albertans, this is a reminder that each member is vital to our mission. We can only do that work with the support of members. Strong membership numbers with advocacy can speak to an important cause, be heard, and cause positive government change.

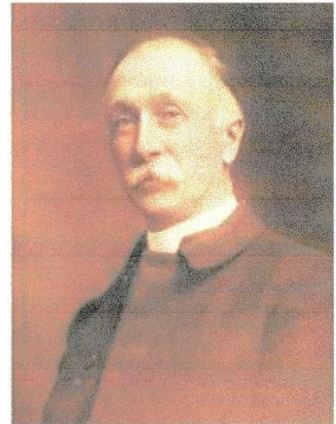
Where else can you make that impact for less than a dime a day?

Ron Thoreson, Editor

Reverend Alexander Forbes & Agnes Sorrel Forbes

Reverend Alexander Forbes was born in Scotland in 1860. He received his training at King's College in Aberdeen, where he met Agnes Sorrel from Montrose, Scotland, who had come to Aberdeen for work. Both had a strong interest in missionary service, and when they became engaged, they committed themselves to the Foreign Field Missionary Committee and waited for an appointment or placement.

Agnes and Alexander arrived in Canada in 1894. The following year, Reverend Forbes was ordained by the Presbytery in Calgary. In September 1895, Agnes and Alexander were married in the Old Presbyterian Church in Edmonton by Reverend D. G. McQueen. Soon afterward, the Presbytery appointed Reverend Forbes, with his wife Agnes, as missionaries to Fort Saskatchewan, where they ministered for 15 years.



In the summer of 1909, the Presbytery asked Reverend Forbes to travel to the Peace River country to establish a new mission. The couple set out for Grande Prairie. In Reverend Forbes's account of their misadventures - hauling a year's supply of missionary provisions (food, furniture, and equipment) by caboose, he recalled that about 600 miles from Fort Saskatchewan an early spring breakup halted their progress, bogging them down at the Simonette River. Stranded, Reverend Forbes sought help from the Argonaut Company, a development group traveling north with a sawmill outfit to establish a townsite at Bezanson.

Various ways and means were discussed on how to reach their destination. Examples of pioneering and community spirit at its best. The two parties pooled their tools, rope, timber, and manpower. Through determination and true pioneer grit, they constructed two large rafts to continue their journey. It was no easy task. Mrs. Agnes Forbes and Mrs. Rae were fondly remembered for sustaining the workers with food and comfort during the ordeal.



For three Sundays during this delay, Reverend Forbes held church services in the wilderness. The simple, reverent gatherings reflected the steadfastness of the early settlers' faith.

There was great rejoicing when the first raft was launched, with Reverend Forbes and Mr. Rae stepping aboard. It buoyed beautifully and inspired hope. Midstream, breakers were encountered, and navigation became extremely treacherous. The ride became so treacherous that they did lose some crates off the

raft. One contained Mrs. Forbes' clothes. She had to do her best until more could arrive. She used moccasins to save her boots. Three days and three nights were spent on that 23-mile stretch of waterway. A weary group eventually found their first meal in a hospitable Bezanson home. They reached their destination on May 3, 1910.

Reverend Forbes shared his plan not only to establish a Presbyterian mission but also a hospital. Reverend and Mrs. Forbes applied for a homestead at the land office in Grouard, requesting a quarter section at Flying Shot Lake on the Clifford Place. Here they established their first home and pioneer hospital before settling on their own homestead.

A small log hospital was built in 1911, and their house was completed by 1912.

In October 1911, McQueen Church was built on the banks of Bear Creek, and services began. Reverend Forbes went on to establish additional churches at Spring Creek (Dimsdale), Bezanson, and Glen Leslie, while also conducting services in homes throughout Bear Lake, Sexsmith, and Kleskun Lake.

In 1914, a community meeting was held to plan the construction of a church at Glen Leslie.

Donations of labour, lumber, and materials poured in. Over the winter, logs were cut and hauled, and with the assistance of one carpenter, Mr. A. Olson, and many volunteers, two 20-by-30-foot log churches were built. Glen Leslie and Bezanson Churches became a reality. These sturdy buildings served not only as places of worship but also as schools for many years.



Tragedy struck in 1917 when Mrs. Agnes Forbes, known for her steadfast Christian service and compassion, died suddenly. She was laid to rest in the Grande Prairie Cemetery.

By 1920, the Peace River Presbytery had been formed, and Reverend Forbes was named Moderator. In May 1921, he married Christine Smith, a nurse with extensive hospital experience.

In 1924, the congregations of the Methodist and Congregational Churches voted to form the "United Church." Reverend Forbes strongly opposed the move. As a result, he resigned his position and moved to Paris, Ontario.

Reverend Forbes later traveled back to Grande Prairie for the dedication of the newly constructed Forbes Presbyterian Church on 101 Avenue and 100 Street, a tribute to his decades of pioneering ministry. Reverend Alexander Forbes died in 1945. This building still is used to support congregations in Wembley. He most likely wouldn't be happy as it is a United Church.

Long lasting links to history, that many do not know–

- 1) Areas/building within GP called Montrose – town in Scotland where Mrs. Forbes was from
- 2) Areas/building within GP called Aberdeen – town in Scotland where they met and where Reverend Forbes attended college
- 3) The Reverend Forbes Homestead is a museum today and is designated a Provincial Historic Resource.

Written by: Sharon (Brown) Annis
Generations Reading Theatre

Research:
GP Capitol of the Peace
Isabel Campbell
South Peace Regional Archives
Forbes Presbyterian Church
Glen Leslie Church Centennial
Pioneers of the Peace

Congratulations to Generations Readers Theatre!

We extend Best Wishes and Congratulations to our friends with Generations Readers Theatre as they take the necessary steps in forming their own society. Exciting opportunities in their evolution into a society will see their public performances continue before audiences that include schools, community events, and seniors. Themes will often still reference local history, but may also use other content material celebrating current events that they can dramatise to entertain and delight their wider public audiences.

GPLT and the Role of Community Theatre

More Than a Stage: GPLT and the Role of Community Theatre

In Grande Prairie and Beyond

For nearly a century, theatre has been part of the cultural heartbeat of Grande Prairie. What began as a handful of passionate performers gathering to tell stories has evolved into one of the area's (and arguably Canada's) largest and most successful community theatre organizations. Today, Grande Prairie Live Theatre (GPLT) occupies a central place in the cultural life of Grande Prairie and the Peace Region. Through generations of volunteers, performers, and audiences, it has helped shape the region's artistic identity while creating opportunities for people to connect through shared creative experiences.

Its story is ultimately about much more than plays and musicals. It is about people, their dedication, and shared passion.

Humble Beginnings

The roots of Grande Prairie Live Theatre reach back to 1932 with the formation of The Good Companion Players. Even in those early years, Grande Prairie was emerging as a cultural centre for northern Alberta, boasting a 50-voice male choir and a symphony orchestra. Theatre quickly became part of that growing artistic landscape.

The Little Theatre Group Orchestra followed in 1935, although theatrical activities slowed during the Second World War. Community organizations such as St. Joseph's Dramatic Society and the United Church Players helped keep local theatre alive through occasional productions.

In 1958, The Grande Prairie Players were formed, and five years later they joined with the Operatic Society to create the Grande Prairie Little Theatre Society. What began as a small volunteer organization producing a couple of shows each year would eventually become one of the region's most influential cultural institutions.

A New Name, A Bigger Vision

In 2001, the organization adopted a new name: Grande Prairie Live Theatre. However, to many it is still nostalgically referred to as the Little Theatre. I love this reference because it subtly denotes their deep roots to the Theatre and its community.

The name change reflected far more than updated branding. It signalled a broader vision of what theatre could be in northern Alberta. The word "live" emphasized the energy, immediacy, and community connection that only live performance can offer. It also represented GPLT's ambition to become a year-round cultural hub rather than simply a theatre company presenting a few annual productions. Over the next two decades, that vision became reality.

Growing Into a Regional Cultural Powerhouse

The numbers tell a remarkable story. I always appreciated hearing former General Manager Wayne Ayling, proclaim the number of bookings in GPLT's venues: a new record being set. The busier it got, the more Vikki Potter had to co-ordinate the influx as the Box Office Manager.

In 1963, the organization relied on approximately 35 volunteers and produced two shows annually. Today, nearly 290 volunteers help support a year-round calendar of productions, concerts, educational programs, and community events, reflecting the remarkable growth of theatre in the Peace Region. The generosity of these volunteers is immeasurable in creating quality programming and entertainment. I personally appreciate the commitment required "to do a show". Many are familiar with the refrain "I can't, I have rehearsal" or "I can't because there is strike that day".

Over more than six decades, over 4,100 volunteers have contributed their time and talents to the organization. Actors, singers, dancers, directors, technicians, designers, builders, stage managers, and countless others have helped bring stories to life. More than 270,000 audience members have passed through GPLT's doors, creating a legacy measured not only in ticket sales but in shared experiences. Many members are willing to share their personal anecdotes, and their challenges of sharing the stage with a live horse. Didn't W.C. Fields have an adage about sharing the stage with children and animals?

Over the years, GPLT's influence has extended beyond the stage, helping launch new cultural initiatives and fostering artistic opportunities that continue to shape the region's creative landscape.

Over the decades, GPLT's influence has steadily expanded. From a small group of local performers, it has grown into an organization that plays a significant role in the cultural life of northern Alberta, supporting artists, volunteers, audiences, and community initiatives across the Peace Region. It is home to Rising Stars, an active and energetic young person theatre camp.

The organization's impact has not gone unnoticed. GPLT has received both municipal and provincial recognition for its contributions to arts and culture, including awards from the Grande Prairie and District Chamber of Commerce and the Alberta Chamber of Commerce.

Beyond Theatre: Building Cultural Infrastructure

More recently, the organization has strengthened its partnership with Northwestern Polytechnic through a long-term agreement that will see major musical productions staged at the Douglas J. Cardinal Performing Arts Centre. The collaboration connects students, educators, artists, and community members while further strengthening Grande Prairie's position as a cultural hub for northern Alberta. Last year's sold out run of *Grease* (directed by Jennifer Robertson) is testament to this renewed collaboration. In February 2027, *Catch Me If You Can* (directed by Tenille Millsap) will be on the marquee.

Why Community Theatre Matters

The success of GPLT raises an important question: why does community theatre matter? GPLT is a prime example of community theatre in a larger centre, however community theatre is a vital force in other smaller centres. Dawson Creek has the KPAC center, Peace River has the Peace Players, and thanks to theatre advocates like Theresa Bell, community theatre continues to flourish. Adrian Tanasichuk, member of the Alberta Drama Festival Association continually spearheads the regional One-Act Drama Festival.

In an era dominated by streaming services, social media, and digital entertainment, community theatre offers something increasingly rare — genuine human connection.

Unlike a movie or television show, theatre is created by people from the community and experienced together by people from the community. Every rehearsal, set build, costume fitting, and performance creates opportunities for relationships to form.

Community theatre brings together people who might otherwise never meet. Students work alongside retirees. Oilfield workers collaborate with teachers. Business owners share the stage with healthcare professionals. Individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and generations unite around a common goal.

The result is something larger than a production. It is a community.

For many participants, theatre becomes a second family. Volunteers often describe theatre as a place where friendships are formed, confidence grows, and people discover skills they never knew they possessed.

This is particularly important in northern communities where long winters and geographic distances can sometimes contribute to social isolation. Community theatre creates spaces where people gather, collaborate, and connect.

Developing Talent and Confidence

One of the most significant contributions of community theatre is its role in developing people.

While some participants discover a passion for acting, many others find opportunities behind the scenes. Theatre requires writers, directors, choreographers, stage managers, lighting operators, carpenters, painters, costume designers, marketers, and event organizers.

Young people gain leadership experience. Adults develop communication and teamwork skills. Volunteers learn how to manage projects, solve problems, and work creatively under pressure.

The confidence gained through theatre often extends far beyond the stage.

Community theatre provides a rare opportunity for people to challenge themselves in a supportive environment. Whether stepping onto a stage for the first time, learning technical skills backstage, or taking on leadership roles within a production, participants often discover abilities they never knew they possessed.

Many of the skills developed through theatre — public speaking, collaboration, critical thinking, organization, and adaptability — carry over into workplaces, schools, and community organizations. In that sense, community theatre serves not only as an artistic outlet but also as a training ground for engaged and confident citizens.

Strengthening the Peace Region

Community theatre also plays an important role in strengthening regional identity.

The Peace Region is a unique place, shaped by agriculture, energy, Indigenous cultures, entrepreneurship, and newcomer communities. Theatre provides a space where those diverse experiences can be reflected, celebrated, and explored.

Stories have always been one of humanity's most powerful tools for understanding one another. Community theatre allows local voices to be heard while fostering conversations about the issues, challenges, and opportunities facing the region.

In this way, theatre becomes more than entertainment. It becomes a reflection of the community itself.

In a world increasingly mediated through screens, community theatre remains one of the few places where people still gather face-to-face to share stories, laughter, emotions, and experiences in real time.

Community theatre is about people choosing to invest in their community. It is the marriage of passionate volunteers and engaged audiences. For more than six decades, Grande Prairie Live Theatre has demonstrated that community theatre is about far more than performance. GPLT and community theatre provide opportunities to learn, perform, create, volunteer, connect and belong.

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In Grande Prairie and across the Peace Region -and beyond- that legacy continues to unfold with the unveiling of each new season.

Written by

Misha Albert, Member, Generations Readers Theatre

BEYOND THE HALCOURT RIDGE

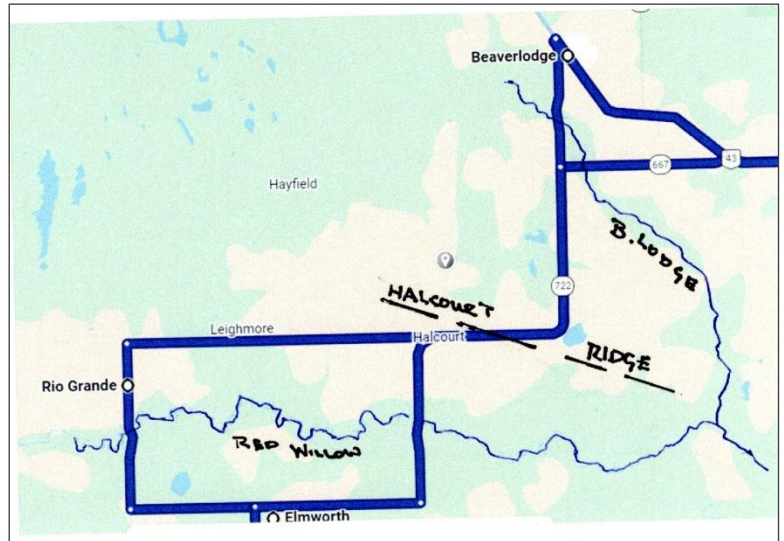
PCHS Bus Tour, June 20th, 2026

A Summary from Pat Wearmouth, Your Tour Guide and Commentator

June 20th saw 30 people aboard a yellow school bus in the Grande Prairie Museum's parking lot. There were a few groans in memory of rough rides as the bus pulled up. But the driver noted that this was a new bus with air ride suspension. We soon found that it provided a much smoother trip.

The bus proceeded west out the City, and eventually into the valleys of the Beaverlodge and the Red Willow rivers. A prominent height of land called the Halcourt Ridge divides the two watersheds.

The tour's purpose was to illustrate some aspects of the early settlement and subsequent development of the area. Commentary while travelling, and at selected stops, aided in this.



Background

The Red Willow valley beyond the ridge is in the southwest corner of the County of Grande Prairie. Prior to settlement, the valley was well known to Indigenous People who would have travelled, hunted and trapped there.

Settlers arrived there in the early 1900s. There were several reasons why they did. The first was that the Peace Country held some of the last free land for homesteading on the North American continent. For ten dollars and a lot of hard work, individuals could own 160 acres of land. Multiply by family members also applying and a sizeable farm could be developed. The Red Willow valley was such a place.

Another draw was the fact that, unlike the present day, the area had very little tree cover. Old timers noted this from their childhood memories. Breaking land could begin without the need to clear forests. An added attraction, although more speculative, was a staked railway survey line that ran through the district. Settlers coming into the Peace Country recognized that a railway was an absolute necessity if an economy was to develop. Settling next to a staked line seemed at the time like a good bet. The railway never did arrive here, but by 1916, one did arrive on the Grande Prairie from the north.

The Tour

Commentary began as the bus climbed the Halcourt Ridge from the north. First pointed out was the Charles McNaught Homestead Historic Site. The McNaughts were an example of the many families that were by nature, community builders. Not only homesteaders with its hard physical work, but also well-read musicians, artists, and teachers. The second was the site of the Harris Brothers farm. As early growers, they were instrumental in developing the creeping red fescue turf grass industry. The Peace Country remains the largest supplier of the seed to the world. If you have a lawn, you probably have fescue.



After cresting the Ridge, the first stop was the Halcourt United Church. The church was built in 1911 as a Methodist Church (a United in 1925). It was constructed of lumber hauled with horses from the banks of the Smoky River, fifty miles to the east. A testament to the importance placed of the building in a time of log construction. A log school was built next the Church which was eventually moved down the hill to the community of Halcourt itself.

The next stop was the community. Here the last replacement school for the log building

was observed, as well as the location of the Funnell family store, the nurse's residence, the Orangeman's Hall, and the blacksmith shop. All were key to providing services needed in the isolated situation of the early settlers.

For instance, here is Nurse Watherston and her horse Archie upon whom she made her rounds of the district. She was famous (or infamous) for organizing tonsillectomies of school children who were required to sit at their desks during the procedure. At the time there was a prevailing theory that tonsils were a point of infection and needed to be removed early.



The Funnells were another family who promoted community. They organized a Sunday school, operated the store and post office, and created Funnell's Orchestra which became quite popular between Halcourt and Grande Prairie.

The bus then drove west towards Rio Grande. On the way it crossed over "Liberty's Hill", named after a family of that name. Bill Liberty was a master stone mason, and built one of the few stone houses found in the area. Bill's bachelor son, Norman, inherited a family fortune which had come from an English firm call the Liberty Thread Company. It was said that one day he was out clearing some land. A lawyer from town drove up and informed Norman of his new wealth. Unfazed, Norman thanked the man, but said he had to get back to work. He did however; wind up buying a brand new D8 Caterpillar tractor shortly thereafter.

Down the hill and around a corner to the west lies the community of Rio Grande. It is named for the Rio Grande River in Texas, after a winter visit there by a local settler. The tour stopped to see the hall, the new Catholic Church, and the cemetery.



Here is the previous church and rectory which sat on the same site. The rectory is now a private residence in Beaverlodge.

The other attraction in the yard is an information board about the Monkman Pass. Alex Monkman, a very early settler in the South Peace, is credited with bringing the possibility of a connection to the west coast for grain shipment to the public's attention.

Rio Grande was the starting point for the building of a highway through the Pass during the late 1930s Depression. Construction crews made up of volunteers worked on the road until WWII broke out. One vehicle, currently in the Grande Prairie Museum, made it through to the west side of the Rockies near Prince George. Construction ceased at the War's start and never resumed.



Isabel was recognized for her efforts to preserve the history of the Peace Region with the Alberta Achievement Award in 1983. In 1988, she was recognized for the George Repka Award

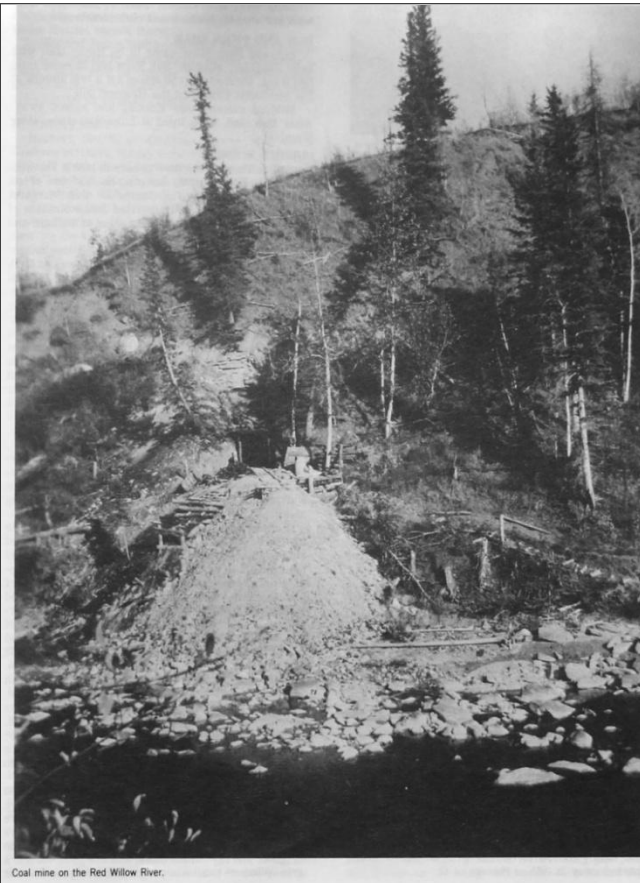
Heading south again, the bus passed by the Rio Grande rodeo grounds. The rodeo originated in 1916, making it 110 years old this year.

After turning east towards Elmworth and Hinton Trail, the bus drove off on a side road to observe a very large gas plant which uses gas from the Deep Basin gas field. It was discovered in the 1970s after the unique geology of the field was understood. It is the largest gas field in Canada.

Just south of the plant is the site of Clyde and Myrtle Campbell's homestead. They were the parents of the late Isabel Campbell (left), a well-known historian of the Peace Country. Isabel advocated for history here for years, including the newspaper columns she wrote.

The tour passed by the Franklin Brewer log barn which still stands to the south of the eastbound road at Elmworth. The Brewers arrived in 1918 and built the barn and a large house. The "Brewery" became the centre of

community activities including church meetings, elections, and the headquarters for the District Nurse, Ministers, and teachers.



Coal mine on the Red Willow River.

East of Elmworth, the tour stopped at the Hinton Trail Hall, where a map of the Hinton Trail was discussed. One branch of the trail runs towards Lake Saskatoon a mile east of the hall. As previously mentioned, the trail is part of an ancient trail used by Indigenous Peoples for millennia as they made their seasonal rounds. It connects with passes through the mountains to the west which made trade possible in both directions.

The second last stop on the tour was at the Red Willow bridge and picnic site. The discussion there centered on a recent dinosaur find in the river bank nearby, and coal mining in the area.

Prior to natural gas becoming available there was a good market for coal heating. The banks of this same river had both underground (shown) and surface strip mines. It supplied the local communities and was hauled by horse and sleigh to Grande Prairie. A two day trip yielded about \$5.00 in profit for the miner.

One such miner made the trip from here to Grande Prairie twice a week for the winter season. He used the proceeds to buy an engagement ring and was heard to remark, "Thank goodness she said yes!"

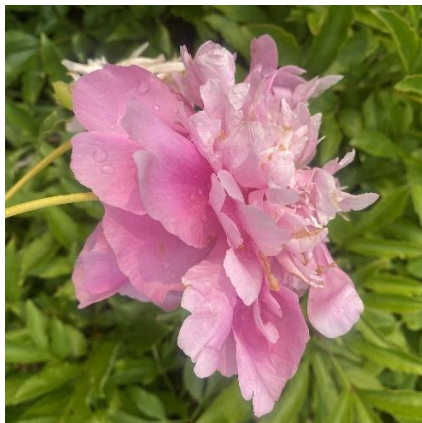


The cairn marks the centennial of farming settlement in the region from 1909-2009.

The last stop was in town at the Beaverlodge Art and Culture Centre. Tea and cakes were served and enjoyed by all. Volunteer staff also gave a short talk on the history of the building which was the old hospital.

After a pass by the Agriculture Experimental Station to check on the peony beds, the bus headed back to Grande Prairie. Full bloom of the beds had not yet happened, but still, a look provided a touch of local tradition in watching for the event.

For those wondering, the blooms happened the following week.



“NEVER SAY NEVER”

WORLD WAR 1 MEDALS RETURNED TO FAMILY

After a decade or more of searching for WWI medals awarded to Private Hugh Norman Johnston, they were finally located and returned to the family.

For many different reasons, families of Veterans, often simply got rid of medals. This usually occurred once the Veteran had passed away and the executor sold the medals or often the medals were just thrown out. It is hard for us in today's world to think of that happening but happen it did - as evidenced by my own family. Those returning home were usually very proud of the medals but on occasion they did sell them.



Approximately 20 years ago, I decided to have all the medals I was in possession of, re-plated and displayed in one frame with an accompanying photo along with a name plaque complete with the Regimental No. I had the complete set for my great uncle, Willis Sr., and my grandfather, Charles, as well as the complete set for my father, Willis Jr. (son of Charles). With medals missing for two great uncles, Hugh “Norman” and William “Earl”, my search began. I started by researching businesses that specialized in “military memorabilia” in Ontario with focus on the Toronto area. No results were found thus I decided to see if I could leave my name and number with auction houses. In 2018, I checked one of the Toronto auction companies and received an



email that one of Hugh “Norman’s” medals had just sold the day before. I immediately called them and was advised that they would contact the purchaser and see if there was a possibility that he would sell them to the “family”. The purchaser was very receptive and said that such medals belong to the family and he did not have a problem with releasing his interest in the medal. Apparently, Hugh “Norman’s” medals were highly sought after as he was a prisoner of war and spent 3 ½ years of the war in the Stendal POW Camp. That transaction brought back to the family, the 1914-1915 Star. Although that was very exciting, there were still two medals to be found – the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. I couldn’t

believe my luck when I came across a company by the name of “Noonans Mayfair” located in London, England who had sold the two remaining medals in a 2013 auction. Their representative, Jim Carver, was very interested in Hugh “Norman’s” story and said he would reach out to the purchaser to see if he/she would be willing to part with the medals. I waited about two months before contacting the auction house again and was told that they did not receive any response from the 2013 purchaser. It was very disappointing news but “never say never” and vowed to keep looking.

Surprise upon surprise, about six months later, I received an email from Jim Carver that the medals had just resurfaced at a different auction house. Jim was able to barter an agreeable deal with the auction house to buy them before they hit the sale date. What a great day! I immediately wired the requested funds and about two weeks later the medals arrived. The good thing about WWI medals is that the recipient’s name is engraved on the rim – and

there it was – his name. These medals are absolutely priceless and back with the family where they belong.



My family, the Johnston's, had four sons enlist in WWI; Private Hugh "Norman" Johnston, Corporal Willis Johnston Sr., Private Charles Johnston, Private William "Earl" Johnston. Willis Johnston Sr. was "killed in action" and was buried in the Kortrijk (St. Jan) Communal Cemetery in Belgium. Another son, Elmer attempted to enlist by stating he was older than his actual age; however, he was rejected due to poor eyesight. The youngest son, Ralph was too young to enlist. Sergeant Willis Johnston Jr. served in country during WWII.

Hugh "Norman" Johnston, oldest son of David and Jane Ann, was recruited by the Edmonton 101st Fusiliers "D" Company in August, 1914. He was subsequently transferred to Valcartier, Quebec where he was re-assigned to the 9th Battalion. He sailed aboard the S.S. Zealand and arrived in Plymouth, England in October 1914. As the 9th Battalion had been dispersed, he was transferred to the 3rd Battalion. After four months of training, the 1st Canadian Division crossed the Bristol Channel to France in February 1915. On April 22, 1915, "Norman" was at the front for the "Second Battle of Ypres". The Germans, in an effort to eliminate the salient, released 160 tons of chlorine gas which drifted into the French and British trenches. The Canadians were the only division that was able to hold the line. On April 23, 1915, Norman suffered a gunshot wound to the left chest area, fracturing a rib and perforating the left lung. From there, he was taken prisoner and transferred to a POW camp in Stendal, Germany. Camp life was documented as very harsh with shortages of food and illnesses being rampant. Once armistice was declared, Norman was a repatriated prisoner of war and arrived in England on January 2, 1919 following which, he sailed for Canada and was discharged in Edmonton in April 1919.

Hugh "Norman" received the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He returned to the Bezanson area and after receiving the patent on his homestead, Hugh "Norman" sold his land and moved to Edmonton where he worked for the

Edmonton

Detective Agency as a "plain-clothes detective". He passed away on

August 8, 1942 at the age of 53 from heart failure and is buried in the military section of the Edmonton Cemetery.

Unfortunately there are no pictures of Norman in uniform – possibility due to the fact he was a prisoner of war.



CICR	
DC/ARCH/ace	Geneva, 6 th November 2008
ATTESTATION	
The International Committee of the Red Cross has received the following information :	
Name, first name	JONSTON Hugh
Rank	Private
Unit	Toronto Regt. 3 Comp. 3 Btl.
Repatriation	- Prisoner of war in German hands, present in the "Feld Lazaret" in Cohn (according to a list dated 27.5.1915) - transferred to the camp of Stendal (according to a list received on 30.6.1915)
From	• Two lists from German authorities

"Stendal camp was located 2 km (1 mi) north-east of the town of Stendal, and was the parent camp for a number of work camps, holding 15,000 men".

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Written by Wanda "Johnston" Zenner, July 2026