



## Promoting, Preserving, Publishing Our Heritage



**Mural of Walter McFarlane by Suzanne Sandboe for The Beaverlodge Mural Foundation**

### **Upcoming Summer/Fall Events – see details on [PCHS Forum](#) | [Facebook](#)**

Additional podcasts are being added for your enjoyment! Our first three video podcasts of the historic major fires from our region, the organizing of area Royal Canadian Legions, and appreciating the Grande Prairie Museum are now uploaded. Our YouTube channel is up at

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

**A notice of events will be sent to members by direct email, and on our [PCHS Forum](#) | [Facebook](#) page.**

Kristi Williams won the free year's membership draw from HSA/PCHS for her early renewal! The five monument-leveling jobs were drawn for Margaret Bowes, Paul and Lila Balisky, David Watson, Wanda Zenner, and Pat Wearmouth. Four are completed and only the Balisky family is finalizing their specific location for work. The rest have been completed, with Pat Wearmouth choosing to donate his win to re-set the McFarlane monuments in recognition of the historic first surveying of the original homestead quarters in 17 townships of the South Peace in 1909-10.

## 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

President—Ron Thoreson  
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David Leonard—Advocacy & Land Settlement  
Ron Thoreson—Newsletter/Web/Facebook  
Charles Taws—Historic Plaque Placements  
Linda Schofield—Generation’s Reading Theatre  
Janet Peterson—Event Greeter/Sign-in

### Contact Us

Newsletter Editor: Ron Thoreson  
rdthor@telusplanet.net  
780-831-6882

### Our New Mailing Address is:

Peace Country Historical Society  
Lower Level, Centre 2000  
11330 106 Street  
Grande Prairie, AB, T8V 7X9

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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 continue with or to join our Society.

## President's Message, Summer 2024

### Events, Books, Reviews, Visuals, Preserving, Preservation, and Some Good Reading

As the days of spring sunshine lengthened, the time to devote to “historical” tasks has shrunk. With too many subjects (and the need to give each the time it deserves) it seems more like a newsroom than a sleepy historical journal. So, we’ve ended up as a combination of both.

### Events (and Organization Changes)

Our Annual General Meeting went forward on April 28<sup>th</sup>, and there was some shifting of chairs. Still, the board and executive will continue working as a unified group of dedicated volunteers as outlined on our masthead. We are very pleased to have Meaghan Pueramaki-Brown as a director, and with consensus, we’ll be able to confirm Dr. David Leonard as our Vice President at our next board meeting.

You should know we will soon have a director’s position open. It can be a rewarding way to contribute to our society, with mentoring if needed.

Following our AGM, the annual Northern Alberta Regional Heritage Fair on May 2<sup>nd</sup> was an unqualified success, and generated excitement for even larger participation next year. The work and student involvement have been awarded the singular distinction as the 2024 recipient of the **Medal of Merit by the Historical Society of Alberta**. Congratulations to the students, teachers, judges, and organizers for their enthusiasm and dedication to learning!

### Archives Move to Centre 2000 Location

On May 22<sup>nd</sup> the South Peace Regional Archives hosted dignitaries and visitors for a ribbon cutting at their new facilities in the lower level of Centre 2000. There was a look behind the scenes into the working areas of the stacks, in addition to the public access sections.



## **Finding Home in the Peace Country**

The combined support of like-minded organizations was key to the presentation by four speakers titled *Finding Home in the Peace Country, Paths of Our Ancestors* on April 7<sup>th</sup>. The Alberta Genealogical Society, GP Branch, and PCHS co-sponsored an informative and successful public afternoon event. Both societies found it a model for future teamwork. See Page 10.

## **Books of Note**

A couple of books to be aware of cover different eras and subject matter of our local region. We hope to see ***New Rivers of the North Revisited*** available soon for today's readers. The 1912 original text by Hulbert Footner has now been edited with context authored by David W. Leonard (text), and Brock Silversides (graphics).

Excerpts are used from the original book titled *New Rivers of the North: The Yarn about two Amateur Explorers of the Headwaters of the Fraser, the Peace River, the Hay River, Alexandra Falls*, that had text written by Hulbert Footner and photographs taken by Footner and his traveling companion Auville Eager.

A more recent tale is ***A Firm Grip and a Calloused Hand: The Stories of Rudy Jacobs, Canadian Pioneer***. When arriving in Canada in 1929, Rudolph Jacobs was a trained electrician and mechanic but spoke no English. He was hired as a bush cutter based on a reassuringly firm grip and the calloused texture of his hand. Years later, when Rudy was a boss, he used the same reliable method to hire honest, hard-working people.

These are the fascinating tales of an enterprising German immigrant who started with nothing and built a rich life and family in the wilds of Western Canada. From the early days of homesteading in Northern Alberta, to trailblazing the Monkman Pass, building The Alaska Highway and the first Trans-Canada Microwave System, Rudy's rich experiences paint a picture of a man forever driven by adventure and the prospect of opportunity. Retold by his eldest son Francis Jacobs – without embellishment, but with a pleasing economy of words – these are Rudy's stories. What started as just a family project ended up as an Amazon.ca paperback.

## **An RCAF Research Update**

Thanks to Wanda Zenner, the mysterious circumstances of Jess Mortwedt's passing have been found in newspaper articles from 1945 in Vancouver. Due to illness, Jesse left the RCAF in early 1945 and was treated at a military hospital. Though he briefly found work at Boeing in Vancouver he passed away in his room from a hemorrhage. A Vancouver news article stated that a brother and sister had been advised of the circumstances, which did not conform with the commemorative plaque in a Legion display next to that of his brother John who passed away in the RCAF in 1952. Both were pictured in our Spring 2024 newsletter, on pages 12-13.



Saint Francis Xavier Church at Sturgeon Lake



The Northern Alberta Railway Museum in McLennan



Rectory



St. John the Baptist Cathedral



Thomas Wallis guided our visit to the full historical site.



St. Paul's Anglican Church in McLennan



## Visuals

Our last bus tour covered a variety of sites, and photos above will give some of the views, but our guides provided the historical context. The first location viewed and described was the original settlement and history of the Sturgeon Lake Reserve. On the road toward McLennan, Dr. David Leonard was assisted by a detailed presentation from the archivist of the Grouard-McLennan Diocese, Shannon Doiron, who spoke on the history of The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Pat Wearmouth spoke of his experiences growing up in a town built on railways and the workers and crews. McLennan was a major rail hub in the north in its heyday.



Smoky River Historical and Genealogical Society staff spoke on their history, resources, and hosted our group for lunch in their facilities in Donnelly.



The first St- Jean-Baptiste church is in the rural area south of the Falher townsite (and honey bee mascot).

Thomas Wollis, studying for the priesthood, guided our group for a full interior tour and history of the remarkable McLennan Cathedral and Rectory. On arriving in Donnelly we were treated to lunch and discussions of the origins and complexity of the genealogical resources held in the Smoky River Historical and Genealogical Society research center. The focus is on the original Francophone settler families and their descendants and offers an impressive working collection of the entire region's archival records with research assistance capabilities. The heritage log church south of Falher is a unique early example of church architecture.



Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto in Girouxville

Passing through the Honey Capital of Canada of Falher, we made a stop in Girouxville to tour their extensive museum of over 6000 artifacts and the adjacent Church Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. It is the site of a Pilgrimage each August, in a large area with 14 statuary installations depicting the Stations of the Cross.



One of the Stations of the Cross in the Grotto



A Beautiful Candelabra, Only One of 6000 Items on Display in the Girouxville Museum



Onward through Tangent, we passed the large church in this small, primarily Francophone hamlet with a population of only 39 in 1991. Our return to Grande Prairie was through Rycroft, and the new larger tour bus proved to be a major improvement for ride comfort and its built-in sound system.

## Preserves

For those wondering about the moose's historical relevance on the cover of our spring newsletter, canned moose meat was a settler staple in many households before the home freezer became a common home appliance. Using “sealers”, (glass jars of various sizes, with lids and threaded metal rings) was a way to preserve large quantities of venison in delicious ready-to-serve portions.

Simple to construct with cubed meat (seared or raw), a dash of pickling salt, and pepper, with options such as onions, some minced garlic, a bouillon cube, and often a bit of beef fat for flavour, the contents could make stews or meat and gravy dishes. It was the heat-and-serve fast food of a homestead kitchen, as the cooking had been done, providing tender meat that never needed a knife! Of course, safety precautions must always be carefully followed when canning meat products.

Other jars could be used for crab apples, rhubarb, or berry preserves for desserts (served with cream). **Readers are encouraged to send in their favourite historical recipes and we'll make it a serial feature to share in future newsletters.**

## Preservation

We continue with efforts to encourage the preservation of historic resources in our region for future generations to enjoy. While it is often complex and time-consuming, we may be able to assist societies or owners with navigating existing programs and regulations to move their projects forward.



The donated five marker re-setting jobs drawn at our speakers' event have now been completed, save one still in the works. Of particular note was the leveling of the Walter and Lillian McFarlane markers (for his granddaughter Heather Mellon) with Pat Wearmouth's kind re-direction of his project win to honour such a remarkable couple. Suzanne Sandboe's mural (pictured on page 1) reminds us of the importance of McFarlane's 1909-1910 survey of the region for incoming settlers.

## Some Good Reading

We hope you enjoy the variety of articles offered in this issue. We are grateful to our contributors and always encourage submissions of historical articles (or interesting tales) for future issues.

Better late than never, but many unusual interruptions kept me from my laptop and getting this newsletter to you sooner. One of the screen hinges broke and is now patched with a large document spring clip. It's the first time I've had a laptop disassemble when opening the screen. It was a further distraction from the worries of a hard drive full to the max. (I need to go shopping!)



Lunch is done, and everyone is awaiting award presentations.

## Northern Alberta Regional Heritage Fair 2024

Susan K Thomson, Heritage Fair Lead Coordinator

On Thursday, May 2, 2024, the Teresa Sargent Hall at the Grande Prairie Library was the site of the Annual Northwestern Alberta Regional Heritage Fair. It was wonderful to see 87 students in grades 5, 6 & 7 come in with 33 Heritage Projects. Two Grande Prairie schools participated this year, the Derek Taylor and Roy Bickell schools. The room was buzzing with excitement. A third



school came to tour the event, and their students and teachers are excited to be able to present next year.

The students were here to share their Canadian Heritage Fair Project with judges and community visitors. These projects hit important Learn Alberta curriculum outcomes for research, written presentation, art, public speaking, creative presentation, and more. The calibre of the projects was impressive! Of the 33 projects, 20 scored 75% or better by judges. Of those, 4 scored 90% or better. Some topics included the Alberta Provincial Government, Immigration, Residential Schools, hockey players, and wars. The varied interests of the students are always welcomed.

To enhance the day, the students had an opportunity to tour the Art Gallery, the Library and take in small group table presentations hosted by the GP Museum, the South Peace Archives, the Old Bezanson Townsite Archaeology Project, the GP Genealogy Society, and the Philip J Currie Museum. It was a full day of sharing knowledge and interaction. To top it off, Jeffery's Café made a variety of lunch options for the students to enjoy, come lunch time.

Two media guests came to check out the Heritage Fair. The Heritage Fair is hosted under the Peace Country Historical Society umbrella, and this year M3M Marketing was contracted to create a podcast. Several students and others interviewed for this venture will be able to listen to it once it is available on the PCHS podcast site. All in all, an amazing day! The CBC and M3M Marketing came to check us out. The local CBC reporter interviewed several individuals and that clip was broadcast on Saturday via CBC Edmonton.

I would like to thank the City of Grande Prairie for the financial sponsorship in the amount of \$730.00. Fresh Pedi Spa and Grande Prairie Live Theatre sponsored prizes for teachers and volunteers. Next year I will solicit door prizes for the participating students. In past years, many local companies have graciously donated products or gift cards to encourage students and make the day more exciting.

I would also like to thank the teachers who worked with their students to make this day a huge success. And thanks to the volunteers for coming out to support these students by judging projects and providing the students with valuable feedback. The community visitors were very pleased to see so many students and the amazing projects they had put so much time and talent into. Two visitors told me they were very pleased to be here today in this excitement, and they truly enjoyed talking to students about their topic.

Last but not least, it was wonderful to have so many of the PCHS Board members come to see what this Heritage Fair celebration is all about. It is an opportunity to bring several generations together. Reflecting on the day, I'm revising the event and already planning for May 1, 2025! This event could readily host over 100 students next year with several more projects! Partners have already signed on for May 1, 2025. Heritage Fair is BACK!!!!

# Finding Home In the Peace Country

## The Paths of our Ancestors

### Summary by Pat Wearmouth

**Finding Home in the Peace Country**  
THE PATHS OF OUR ANCESTORS

Come and hear how historical events affected family migrations that eventually led you or your ancestors to North America, Canada, Alberta, and the Peace Country. Four historians will lead us along a timeline that describes how these events unfolded.

**HISTORIANS**  
**Joanne Gontar**—the many paths taken to found the Sturgeon Lake indigenous community.  
**Duff Crerar**—the push and pull of historical events.  
**David Leonard**—factors that drew people to the Peace prior to WWI  
**Bob Irwin**—later developments that continued to pull people to the Peace

Please REGISTER with Email Pat: [wearmo@telus.net](mailto:wearmo@telus.net), prior to **March 28th**  
 -Indicate your attendance at the seminar  
 -Also please let us know if you would like to attend a post seminar supper at a local restaurant with the historians for further discussion.  
 Supper would be at your own cost

**SUNDAY, APRIL 7TH**  
**GRANDE PRAIRIE PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**1:00 TO 5:00 PM**

While admission is free, we kindly ask for a donation to support local history

A CO SPONSORED EVENT OF THE PEACE COUNTRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND THE GRANDE PRAIRIE DISTRICT BRANCH OF THE ALBERTA GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

In April, the PCHS and the Grande Prairie Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society co-hosted a seminar designed to connect family roots to historical events. What were the events that pushed and/or pulled families to move to Canada, the Provinces, and the Peace Country? How would an understanding of these events help you research your family roots?

The seminar was a great success, as four knowledgeable and dynamic speakers held the audience rapt for an afternoon.

### Joanne Gontar

The first speaker was Joanne Gontar, a historian of the Sturgeon Lake Cree. She described how she developed her interest in the history of her family and the wider community. She spoke of some challenges facing Indigenous Peoples in finding their history.



L to R: Duff Crerar, David Leonard, Joanne Gontar, Robert Irwin.

It began in her childhood. Instead of helping in the kitchen like her sisters were required to do, her mom insisted Joanne’s job was to listen to and learn the stories told by the Elders. These stories were oral history (personal reminiscences) or oral traditions (cultural information). This is the means by which Indigenous Peoples give history, teachings, and culture to the next generation. One story learned, for example, was about her great-grandfather, “The Captain”, who signed Treaty 8 for the Peoples of Sturgeon Lake in 1899.

As time passed, Joanne’s interest turned into a serious hobby of researching family and community roots. Besides the oral part, she began to search out written records. Her sources included government files, archives material, and church and school records.

However, Joanne found some unique challenges in finding Indigenous Peoples' individual and family information. She noted the many gaps and restrictions to accessing the records from these sources. Complete trapline records, for instance, were never stored at the PAA because of space restrictions. Many were discarded. As many Indigenous Peoples trapped, the records would have been valuable.

Other examples included the severe restrictions on records in the PAA and in churches to ensure confidentiality. These included long delays in accessing birth, marriage, and death records, years long. An individual's Cree name was mistranslated or misspelled. This comes about because a person would have changed names as they moved through various stages of life; a child's name being replaced by an adult name, for instance. And as a last point, Joanne noted the diminishing number of Cree speakers, those who could translate or tell stories in the original form.

Despite the issues, she continues to find family and community roots research a satisfying way to spend time. She confessed that her favorite vacation spot is, in fact, the Provincial Archives. And that one practical result of her research is that several stories are available as eulogy for funerals.

### **Duff Crerar**

The second presenter was Duff Crerar, a historian and retired, but still very active, history instructor from the Grande Prairie Regional College. Duff's presentation focused on the reasons people felt pushed to move, the first step in migration. He focused first on national events and used his own family as an example of the individual decisions that families make.

He began by noting that migration has shaped all human history. Almost no known historical group is living where they started. There were many reasons, but one was the population boom that occurred in Europe as new crops and techniques increased food supplies to support greater numbers of people. Along with improved medicine and health care, families expanded, and land for succeeding generations became limited in supply and very expensive. Work in cities was an option for some, but not if you wished to maintain traditional agriculture pursuits.

Other push mechanisms included the disruption of frequent wars and famines after major crop failures (e.g. potatoes in Ireland). All were incentives to migrate and create a better life. The push was further enabled by improving transport systems. Sail and steamships for ocean passage, canals, and railways for travel overland.

Duff then turned to his own family. They left their slow but inevitable decline in prospects in the Scottish Highlands and migrated to Upper Canada in the 1840s and 1850s. They kept up their mixed farming traditions in Eastern Ontario, but within two generations found themselves in the same situation as in Scotland. One brother opted to move his family to the Peace Country in the early settlement years, where they could pre-empt and prove up land west of Grande Prairie. The other brother, Duff's direct ancestor, stayed in Ontario, where Duff grew up.

As a summary point about roots research, Duff noted that letters, diaries, and pictures tell us much about our family roots. But don't forget to look at census data (Federal Archives), wills (Provincial probate offices), dates of life events (Provincial Vital Statistics office), and tax records

Municipal, Provincial, and Federal tax offices). Note that some of these records will be unavailable for periods of time, because of confidentiality requirements.

### **David Leonard**

David Leonard, also a retired but active historian and archivist, spoke next. He moved on to the factors that pulled people to the Peace Country. He began by describing how the Peace Country was assessed for agricultural potential. Major assessments were done by several natural scientists sent out by the Federal Government to do so. They traveled through the Peace Country in the late 1800s and looked at various aspects of the area, including soils, growing season length, and crops already grown by very early pioneers. There were strong recommendations, both positive and negative, about the potential of the Peace. Eventually, the positive side made the better case and the Federal Government, in favour of settlement, began encouraging settlers.

David then described the factors that created the pull for settlers before 1916:

1. The vast extent of government promotion, at both the federal and provincial levels.
2. That a major railway company, the Canadian Northern, was in the process of building to the region beginning in 1909, and other railway companies were proposing to begin. Settlers thought one at least would reach the Pacific coast with a promise of low freight rates.
3. That, by 1908, grain prices in North America had been falling and a quarter-section farm could no longer sustain a family of any size. Changes were made to the Dominion Lands Act allowing a homesteader to purchase lands on adjoining homesteads to increase their landholdings.
4. The availability of South African scrip. Also beginning in 1908, Boer war veterans were offered two quarter-sections of land on the western prairies provided he would perform the usual homestead duties on them. They had the choice of taking up the land or selling the scrip to others. Scrip was used heavily in the Peace River region because such a vast extent of land had just been opened for settlement.
5. The instant availability of such a vast extent of farmland also facilitated group settlement, whereby people who shared similar ethnic or religious backgrounds could settle near each other and derive benefit from mutual co-operation.
6. The success of group settlements, of course, opened lines of communication with other people in eastern Canada, the United States, and Europe, especially in the northern climes, where people were not deterred by the fact of cold winters. The successful settlement rate of 62% in the Peace River region did not go unnoticed in other areas of the western world once letters home told of the richness of the soil, the prospect that a railway was on its way, and that there would be friends around to help them get a new start.
7. The full development of Marquis wheat by Charles Saunders, which was heavily advertised beginning in 1909. This was an especially hearty variety, ideal for a harsh northern environment. The result was notable. By 1916, when the railway arrived in Grande Prairie and Peace River, over 10,000 Euro-Canadian settlers had arrived in the Peace Country. It marked the largest extent of inland settlement on the North American continent without the benefit of a railway in place.

David is responsible for the Peace Country Land Settlement Data Base which is found on the South Peace Regional Archives website. It will be useful to family roots researchers whose ancestors arrived up until 1930.

### **Robert (Bob) Irwin**

Robert Irwin teaches history at MacEwan University in Edmonton, but has a strong interest, and a long association, with the Peace Country. His presentation described the factors that continued to pull people into the Peace Country after the initial settlement phase prior to 1916.

Bob began by continuing with the pull of agricultural land. In 1917, Canada created the Soldiers Settlement Act, designed to ease the transition of soldiers back into civilian life. The Act and its Board assisted WWI veterans to set up farms. Many returning soldiers came to the Peace Country. They started farms, but a recession in the early 1920s meant that many did not make a go of it. Settlement picked up, however, between 1927 and 1931 as the economy improved and several area farmers (e.g. Trelle, Cochrane) won international championships for cereal and small seed crops. Farmers elsewhere paid attention and became interested in the potential of the Peace.

After 1930, Alberta was the only province to provide free homesteads, although conditions for proving them up still applied. At least until the 1960s, people could pursue this route for land ownership. Also, international refugees such as Russian Orthodox, Sudeten German, and Old Order Mennonite migrants were taking up land for farming from the late 1920s onward.

But other pull factors were becoming equally valid. The Alaska Highway was built in 1942. Its construction used large amounts of both timbers and dimensional lumber and helped to enlarge the local forest products industry. Similarly, the war effort expanded the discovery and production of oil and gas in the Peace Country. Success was found in the Pouce Coupe/Bonanza areas along the provincial border. Both these industries continued to expand over time as the transport infrastructure expanded. Additional highways, resource roads, and railways were built, leading to more sources of revenue. When added to agriculture, two industries, forestry and petroleum, became the three-legged mainstay of the Peace Country's economy. All provided work to incoming migrants, as did the service sectors needed to support them (e.g. medical, educational, and government services).

For those seeking family roots, recent records found locally within relatively new community libraries and archives can be helpful, when added to provincial archives and other resources.

# CANADA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

## Normandy Massacres 1944

The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade landed on Juno Beach on D-Day, June 6th.



*Soldiers of the German 12<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division in a temporary prisoner of war cage in Normandy. Two Canadian Provost Corps soldiers stand guard, July 7-8, 1944.*

The Canadians overcame the beach defences after a collective effort but at a heavy price in lives. The move inland began the same day and by evening, Canadian troops dug into their captured positions. It was the next day that the Canadians first encountered the division that would become their main nemesis in Normandy, the 12th SS Panzer Division (Hitler Youth). In the days following June 6th hundreds of Canadian prisoners of war (POW) fell into the hands of the 12th SS. Unfortunately for many of these Canadians, their capture led to them being murdered in cold blood.

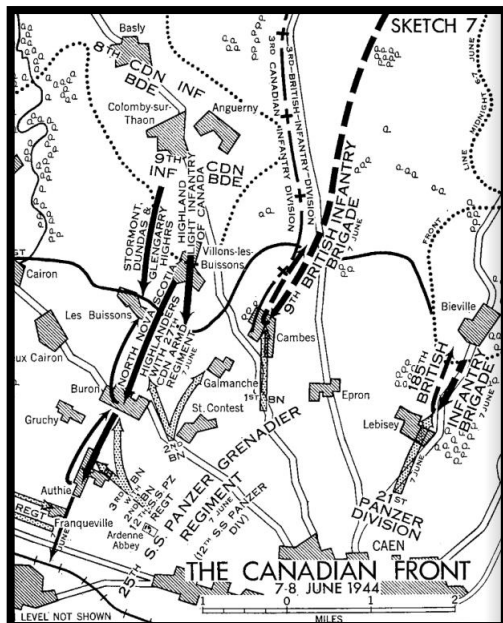
The 12th SS Panzer Division was made up of Hitler Youth members, aged seventeen to nineteen years old, as well as battle-hardened officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from the

1st SS Panzer Division (*Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*). This division began as Hitler's personal guard and had fought on the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union. The combination of fanatical Nazi teenagers and an NCO corps that had fought in the brutalized conditions of the east led to the division having the propensity to murder POWs.

### *The Canadian Front, 7-8 June*

#### **Authie, Buron, and the Abbey d'Ardenne**

On June 7th infantry of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and Sherman tanks of the 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment (the Sherbrooke Fusilier Regiment), acting as the spear point of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade's advance toward Carpiquet, moved toward the village of Authie through Buron. The tanks pushed past Authie, where they were attacked by tanks of the 12th SS Panzer Regiment (not to be confused with the whole division) which, along with the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, were under the command of *Standartenführer* Kurt Meyer. As the tank fight subsided, the infantry of "C" Company of the North Novas in Authie were attacked by German infantry of the 3rd Battalion, 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment led by *Obersturmbannführer* Karl-Heinz Milius. The North Novas fought until surrounded, after which they surrendered.



Prior to the Allied landings in Normandy, Meyer had reportedly told his troops to make use of the coming invasion to retaliate against the Allies for their bombing of German cities. It was at Authie that the murdering of POWs

by the 12th SS began, seemingly in line with what Meyer suggested they do. A group of Canadians were simply shot after surrendering, while others were bayoneted and beaten to death. Dead Canadians were purposefully run over by a German tank. Outside Authie, the troops of "A" Company were eventually cut off and surrendered as well. Several of these men were shot by their German captors soon after their surrender.

The fighting moved to Buron where elements of “D” Company were captured outside the village. They were marched to Buron after it had been captured by the Germans. Everything of value was stripped from the POWs. One Canadian was shot for carrying a grenade, although Canadian witnesses testified it was a chocolate tin. As the column of Canadian POWs moved towards the German rear, a truck with Red Cross markings deliberately veered into the prisoners, killing two and wounding another. Other POWs were murdered when a commander of an SS detachment shot them while they were marching to the rear.



*The memorial garden at the Abbey pays tribute to the soldiers murdered on these grounds.*

Dozens of Canadians were taken as POWs during the fighting at Authie and Buron. Those not killed in the immediate aftermath were sent to the nearby Abbaye d’Ardenne, where Kurt Meyer had set up his headquarters. On the evening of June 7th, eleven Canadians from both the North Novas and Sherbrooke Fusiliers were executed in the abbey’s garden. The next day seven more POWs, all of them North Novas, were brought to the abbey, interrogated, and sent one by one to their deaths. **They were shot in the back of their heads in the garden.** Each man shook hands with

their living companions before facing their fate among the bodies of their murdered comrades.



*The faces and names of the 20 Canadian soldiers murdered at the Abbey in June 1944 are displayed on the garden wall, 2017*

Much later, on June 17th, two more Canadians, Lieutenant Fred Williams and Lance-Corporal George Pollard were also murdered at, or nearby, the abbey. The bodies of all those killed at the abbey were later found, except for Pollard. In total twenty Canadians were murdered by the 12th SS at the Abbey d’Ardenne.

### **Château d’Audrieu**

The murder of Canadian POWs was not isolated to the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade’s front. Troops from the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade were also murdered at the hands of the 12th SS. These killings followed the fighting around Putot-en-Bessin. On the afternoon of June 8th, the 12th SS Division launched a fierce counterattack toward the positions of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles defending the village. The Winnipeg Rifles fought to hold the village but were pushed back. The German attack cut off several of their companies, leading to several Winnipeg Rifles soldiers being executed by the Germans near Putot. The details of their deaths are unclear as their bodies were found after Putot had been retaken by the Canadians later on the 8th.

Most of the killings took place at two locations. The first was the Château d’Audrieu. *Sturmbannführer* Gerhard Bremer, commander of the 12th SS Reconnaissance Battalion, set up his headquarters in the chateau. When POWs started to arrive, Bremer, who spoke fluent English, questioned three POWs, Major Frederick Hodge, Lance Corporal Austin Fuller, and Private Frederick Smith. When they provided no information, they were executed. Privates David Gold, James McIntosh,

and William Thomas were also executed on the chateau grounds shortly after the first killings. More Canadian POWs were machine gunned near the chateau later in the day. In total, the SS murdered nineteen Canadians at the Château d’Audrieu.

### **Le Haut Du Bosq**

*Obersturmbannführer* Wilhelm Mohnke, commander of the 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, set up his headquarters near a cluster of houses known as Le Haut du Bosq, located in a wooded area between Grainville and Cheux. On the night of June 8th, Mohnke ordered the murder of many POWs in a field near Fontenay-le-Pesnel after racing to meet a column of POWs headed for his headquarters. Mohnke was driven into a murderous rage after his previous order to *Sturmbannführer* Bernhard Siebken (commander of the 2nd Battalion of the regiment) to stop sending POWs to the rear, was not followed. Mohnke also ordered the killings of three Canadian POWs, Private Harold Angel, Riflemen Frederick Holness, and Ernest Baskerville, at Siebken’s headquarters. The SS carried out these murders on the morning of the 9th. On June 11th, a further three Canadians, Sappers John Lonel and George Benner and Private Allan Owens, were murdered in a field with Mohnke watching. Forty-one POWs were murdered either by direct orders of Mohnke or by troops under his command.

## **Conclusion**

The sites above were not the only places where the 12th SS murdered Canadian POWs. Regina Rifles Lance Corporal David Moloney and Privates Cecil Borne, Norman Morin, and John Sawatzky, were executed in a clearing south of the Caen-Bayeux highway near Bretteville l’Orgueilleuse after being captured when their outpost was overrun by the 12th SS. Another lesser-known series of executions of Canadian POWs was after the battle at Le Mesnil-Patry on June 11th. There were as many as six separate incidents of POWs being murdered near that battlefield. In total as many as 156 Canadian soldiers, mostly taken prisoner by the 12th SS, were executed by their captors during various incidents in June 1944 in

Normandy. Some chilling statistics result from these murders. **One out of every seven Canadians killed in Normandy from June 6th to 11th was not killed in combat but was executed as a POW.**



*SS Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer standing in court with escorts*

The 12th SS commanders faced few consequences for the killings that were carried out either by their direct orders or by troops under their command. Mohnke escaped prosecution after an investigation by Canadian authorities in the immediate aftermath of the war. Mohnke’s case was re-examined in the mid-1970s, but West German prosecutors concluded that there was insufficient evidence to bring charges. He died at the age of 91. Bremer also escaped prosecution for the murder of the Canadian POWs. He moved to Spain in the late 1940s. Siebken was the single commander responsible for the murders who

was executed for his crimes. He was convicted for the murders of Angel, Holness, and Baskerville and was hung on January 20th, 1949.

An Allied court investigation recommended that Milius be indicted for war crimes but he was later released with no charges filed. In December 1945 a Canadian Military Court tried Kurt Meyer for war crimes. He was acquitted of twenty-three murders near Authie and Buron on June 7th 1944. However, Meyer was ultimately found guilty on several counts, linked to the murders at the Abbey d’Ardenne. Meyer was sentenced to death, which he appealed. He was successful in his appeal and his verdict was commuted to a life sentence after Canadian Major-General Christopher Vokes was reluctant to sentence Meyer to death without evidence of a direct order to execute Canadian POWs. After serving prison time in Canada and West Germany, Meyer was released after less than ten years of serving his sentence. He died in 1961.



## The 156 Canadians Murdered in Normandy June 7<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup>, 1944

Adams, William C.  
Anderson, H.E.  
Angel, Harold S.  
Arsenault, Joseph F  
Arsenault, Joseph  
Bailey, Harold W.  
Barker, Reginald D  
Baskerville, Ernest  
Beaudoin, Oscar J.  
Bebee, Charles  
Bellefontaine, Oswald  
Benner, George A.  
Beresford, William  
Birston, Hilliard J  
Bishoff, Emmanuel  
Bolt, James E.  
Booth, Walter J.  
Borne, Cecil M.  
Bowes, Arnold D.  
Bradley, Ernest W.  
Brown, George  
Brown, Lome  
Brown, Walter  
Bullock, Paul  
Burnett, Donald J.  
Campbell, John R.  
Charron, Albert A.  
Chartrand, Lawrence  
Chartrand, Louis  
Cook, Etsel J.  
Cranfield, Ernest  
Cresswell, Sidney  
Crowe, Ivan L.  
Culleton, Stewart  
Daniels, Walter  
Davidson, Thomas  
Doucette, Charles  
Doherty, Walter M.  
Dumont, John D.  
Fagnan, Anthony  
Ferguson, William  
Findlay, Robert M.  
Firman, Roger J.  
Fleet, Lambert A.  
Fontaine, George  
Forbes, J.  
Freeman, Lant  
Fuller, Austin R.  
Gilbank, Ernest N.  
Gill, George V.  
Gold, David S.  
Gosse, Silby  
Grant, Thomas J.D.  
Guiboche, Lawrence  
Gurney, Robert J.  
Hancock, Arthur R.  
Hargreaves, Jeffrey  
Harkness, Alvin J.J.

Harper, Robert J.  
Harrison, Francis D.  
Henry, Thomas H.  
Hill, John W.  
Hodge, Frederick E  
Holness, Frederick  
Horton, Charles A.  
Lonel, John  
Izzard, William L.  
Jones, Henry C.  
Julian, Anthony  
Keeping, Reginald  
Kines, Clare D.  
Kyle, James F.  
Labrecque, Herve  
Lawrence, Kenneth  
Leclair, Joseph  
Lefort, Elmer J.  
Lewis, Gordon J.  
Lockhead, Roger  
Loucks, William D  
Lychowich, John L  
Macdonald, Chas  
MacDonald Hugh  
MacIntyre, Joseph  
MacKinnon, James  
MacLeod, Angus  
MacRae, Roderick  
Marych, Frederick  
McGinnis, William  
McIntosh, James D  
McKeil, Hollis L.  
McKinnon, Will  
McLaughlin, Thos  
McNaughton, Geo.  
Meakin, Frank V.  
Meakin, George E.  
Metcalf, John  
Millar, George E.  
Moloney, David T.  
Mont, Thomas E.  
Moore, Raymond  
Morin, Norman J.  
Morrison, Wesley  
Moss, James A.  
Muntion, George  
Murray, John B.  
Mutch, Robert  
Nichol, William  
O'Leary, Gerard J.  
Orford, Douglas S.  
Ostir, Frank  
Owens, Allan R.  
Parisian, Percy  
Perry, Clayton G.  
Peterson, Alfred M  
Philp, Harold G.  
Poho, William

Pollard, George G.  
Povol, Ervin  
Preston, Lee I.  
Reid, James A.  
Reynolds, Henry E.  
Riggs, Cecil  
Rodgers, Henry  
Ryckman, Frank  
Sawatzky, John  
Scott, Robert  
Scriven, Gilbert H.  
Sigurdson, Kjartan  
Silverberg, Frank  
Simmons, William  
Smith, Edward  
Smith, Frederick  
Smith, Richard G.  
Smuck, Harry L.  
Slywchuk, Steve  
Sutton, Lawrence F  
Taylor, James A.  
Thomas, William  
Thompson, John A.  
Tobin, Douglas V.  
Vickery, Nelson J.  
Webster, James S.  
Willett, Gerald L.  
Williams, Fred  
Williams, James P.  
Windsor, Thomas

### "Ten" known but to God

*Wanda Zenner – March 2024  
Excerpt from Juno Beach article  
Juno Beach Centre,  
Canadian War Museum  
Author: Brad St. Croix*

# Who Was Nobby Clark?

David W. Leonard

Though much has been said and written about this intriguing man, the facts of his place in the history of the south Peace River Country remain a mystery to many. The following article is intended to clarify at least a few points surrounding him.



With the end of World War I, and the placement of many hardened war veterans on land in the Peace River Country, it is understandable there would be an increase in crime in the region, particularly the south Peace. By 1921, the population of the district which would eventually become the County of Grande Prairie had risen to 6,362, with many newer settlers having taken up land through the Soldiers Settlement Board.<sup>1</sup> This was especially the case in the fringe areas such as Rio Grande, Webster, Teepee Creek, and, especially, Bad Heart where most of the population consisted of war veterans and their families.

In 1918, the entire Peace River Country was policed by the Alberta Provincial Police, based in Peace River. In his Annual Report that year, the Superintendent of the Division stated:

*There has been an increase in the number of offences dealt with; the increase following upon the increase in population. It is becoming more than ever apparent, however, that the strength of this Division must be increased to keep pace with the changing conditions, if crime and vice are to be effectively dealt with. The men available to police this district are insufficient, and it is impossible to give prompt attention to all complaints.<sup>2</sup>*

The most famous case during this time involved the murder of six men of eastern European origin in June, 1918 on two farms just northwest of Grande Prairie. Although Dan Lough was charged with the crime, he was acquitted and the case remained unsolved.<sup>3</sup>

The Lough trial resulted in the creation of a Sub-judicial District of Grande Prairie in 1919 and the establishment of a separate Grande Prairie Division of the APP in 1920, and was by far the one case to receive the most attention province wide. However, in the early 1920s, the individual to stand out the most for disruptive behavior in the region was one George Frederick Clark (known locally as Nobby), a highly decorated veteran who had taken a Soldier's lease in the Bad Heart district. Between 1919 and 1924, he would appear eight times in the new courthouse in Grande Prairie to face various charges including assault, threats of violence, carrying a concealed pistol, and attempted suicide.

Nobby Clark was born in Nova Scotia in 1893 and had traveled to South Africa and elsewhere before landing in James Bay, British Columbia in 1914. That August, he joined the Canadian Over-seas Expeditionary Force to engage in the Great War in Europe. His attestation papers disclose he had already worked three years for the Royal Northwest Mounted Police.<sup>4</sup> His vocation was that of a gunsmith. During the war, he served bravely, receiving both the British Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Croix de Guerre from the President of France.<sup>5</sup> The citation for his DMC, bestowed on 11 March 1916, reads:

*For conspicuous gallantry; he brought in a wounded man, under heavy fire, from close in front of the enemy fire. In doing this he was shot through the cap, but immediately went out again, and, with great bravery, succeeded in recovering a machine gun, which had been abandoned close to enemy lines.<sup>6</sup>*

In November 1916, he received a separate bar to his DMC for additional acts of bravery, meaning, essentially, he won the award twice. This second commendation reads:

*For conspicuous gallantry in action. He showed great determination and gallantry on patrols. Later, with a corporal, he captured an enemy officer and shot an enemy soldier. He displayed great courage and initiative.*<sup>7</sup>

Nobby's rebellious nature however was also evident during his service. In March 1915, he was confined for ten days in a military jail for being "drunk, absence from billet, & creating a disturbance." He was confined again in June, 1916 for "using threatening language to his Superior Officer."<sup>8</sup> He was reported to have said, "This is where I do 14 or 28 days or anything for you. Will you take your licking now or after stables?" He was sentenced to 56 days imprisonment, and for ten more in May, 1918 for drunkenness while on duty.

Nobby was wounded in the left hip October, 1916 and spent time convalescing in London. While there, he met a nurse named Gladys, fell in love, and, just before his reinstatement to duty, the two were married. At the end of the war, he was discharged and decided to avail himself of the offer of the Soldiers Settlement Board and take up farming in western Canada. A friend from Nova Scotia and fellow war veteran, Harley Conrad, had, by now, homesteaded in the Clairmont district, and he told Nobby about the rich farmland in the region in general. Nobby selected SW9 TP75 R2 W6 in the newly opened up Bad Heart district, and, in early 1919, he moved there with Gladys. In 1920, they were joined by his older brother, John, also from Nova Scotia, and his family.<sup>9</sup>

Nobby's penchant for trouble soon followed him to this district. He soon quarreled with some of his neighbours, brandished his gun about, and was often drunk, sometimes with moonshine from his own still. From December 1919 to September 1921, he was in court six times in Grande Prairie, a record that still stands for a 21 month period. The charges were "assault," "threatening violence," "carrying a concealed weapon," and having no permit for his pistol. He was also convicted by the Justice of the Peace at Spirit River, Harry Rycroft, for three other offences. He managed to evade some charges for lack of evidence, or, in the case of the weapons, he argued that they were necessary for him to fulfill his role as a game guardian.<sup>10</sup> He did, however, have, in all, eight convictions against him by 1924.

Nobby became so notorious that the Attorney General of Alberta, John Brownlee, made a request of the MLA for the Peace River riding, Donald Kennedy of Waterhole, to make a special investigation. Kennedy traveled to Grande Prairie and the Bad Heart to interview people, including Nobby and his neighbours, and found that some of the trouble stemmed from local discontent with the nearby Kleskun Ranch and their cattle drives to the flats of the Smoky River, some of which apparently trespassed over Nobby's SSB land. He and others were also upset by the Ranch being allowed to fence off large sections of the eastern flats of the Smoky River to exclusively graze their own cattle in summer.<sup>11</sup>

In concluding his report to the Attorney General, Kennedy stated:

1. *Everyone says "Clark is no good."*
2. *He's a moonshiner and a gun man only he lacks courage.*
3. *He's as much a nuisance to his neighbours as he is to the Kleskun Ranch.*
4. *He says they will yet be glad to pay him \$20,000 to get out.*

*Unless the law takes care of him he will shoot or be shot in time. No self-respecting bunch of people will be humbugged with the like of Clark indefinitely.*<sup>12</sup>

Finally, in November 1921, Nobby was tried and convicted of intimidation and sentenced to six months imprisonment at Fort Saskatchewan.<sup>13</sup>



Up to this time, unless away on some adventure or other employment, Nobby was living with Gladys (shown at left) on his Soldier's lease. Eventually, however, she had enough, and, in the autumn of 1923, she made preparations to return to England. When he discovered she had gone to Grande Prairie to catch the train to Edmonton, Nobby followed her, pleading with her to stay. She left however, and, on 6 November, the *Grande Prairie Herald* carried the headline that "Geo. Clark, Bad Heart Farmer Attempts Suicide." While in the Donald Hotel, Nobby shot himself in the head with a revolver, but was only wounded. He was taken to the Prittie Hospital and treated, but his troubles were not over, for attempted suicide was then a crime, and Nobby was charged, convicted, and sentenced to another three months at Fort Saskatchewan. His internment this time was much longer, for he was considered in no mental condition to be released. In December 1923, it was reported that:

*His intellect is not good, and he is moody and depressed, and looks upon the dark side of things. He says he is tired of things and is sorry the attempt he made upon his life was not successful.*<sup>14</sup>

As there was no indication of actual mental illness, Nobby was eventually released from prison. Shortly thereafter however, he was charged and convicted of assault in Sexsmith.<sup>15</sup> According to his lawyer, J.P. McIsaac, after his sentencing to two months at Fort Saskatchewan, "His neighbours in the Bad Heart district have been greatly harassed by him and the Magistrate states and rightly so that there is evidently no earthly use in fining him."<sup>16</sup> He was then taken to Fort Saskatchewan again in the company of two Provincial Police officers, because, according to one, "He threatened to make his escape or commit suicide if he had the least opportunity. He also advised me not to take any chances with him as he is not responsible."



Following this term at Fort Saskatchewan, Nobby moved to Edmonton, where he worked as a gunsmith and lived on 94<sup>th</sup> Street and 105<sup>th</sup> Avenue. His SSB lease at Bad Heart was terminated in 1933. He then moved to Vancouver, and, when World War II broke out, he joined the Canadian Army as an "armourer," or gunsmith, at age 47.<sup>17</sup> In March 1943, he became ill and was discharged, having reached the rank of sergeant. His conduct during the war was described as "very good." He then made his way back to the Grande Prairie and opened up a gun shop in Sexsmith. Here he stayed until his death in 1963, becoming a steadfast member of the Canadian Legion and a local legend. He also became a poet in his later years, one of his verses containing the lines:

*And I broke the heart of a good woman  
Who had given me treasures untold.  
And the small voices come from the darkness  
And they say 'you must repay  
For the men you have killed  
And the hearts you have broke,  
As you went on your wicked way'.  
And I wonder at last what it has gained me,  
As I come to the end of the trail,  
And I see the dark river before me,  
The river I know I must cross –  
And I dread.*<sup>18</sup>



Nobby was buried in the military section of the Grande Prairie Cemetery.

<sup>1</sup> This figure was calculated by adding the populations of each township with that of the Town of Grande Prairie (1,061) and the Village of Clairmont (130) according to the Canadian Census of 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta, 73.370 (Annual Reports of the Alberta Provincial Police), Report for 1918, Peace River Division.

<sup>3</sup> See David W. Leonard, "Murder on the Prairie," in *Alberta History*, Vol.58. #4 (Autumn 2010), p.2-10.

<sup>4</sup> See Archives.ca (Library and Archives of Canada), and go to "Archivanet," and onto "Veterans of World War I."

<sup>5</sup> See the *London Gazette*, 14 January and 30 March, 1916.

<sup>6</sup> *London Gazette*, 8 April, 1916, p.3319. See also the citation in David K. Riddle and Donald G. Mitchell, *The Distinguished Conduct Medal* (Winnipeg: Kirby-Marlton Press, 1991), p.48.

<sup>7</sup> *London Gazette*, 23 December, 1916, p.2083.

<sup>8</sup> See Nobby's record in NAC, National Personnel Records Center, Regimental number K-90051.

<sup>9</sup> See John's story, and much of Nobby's, in *Wagon Trails Grown Over: Sexsmith to the Smoky* (Sexsmith: Sexsmith to the Smoky Historical Society, 1980), pp.26-33.

<sup>10</sup> See the records of the Grande Prairie Court in PAA, 79.119.

<sup>11</sup> See an interview with Ken Purdy, a former Kleskun Lake Ranch foreman, in the Glenbow-Alberta Archives, MG4560 (Loggie Interviews), B23. See also John Clark's account in *Wagon Trails Grown Over*, pp.30-31. For more on the Ranch, see David W. Leonard, "The Story of the Peace River Country's Kleskun Ranch," *Alberta History*, Vol.70, #4 (Autumn, 2022), pp.10-20.

<sup>12</sup> PAA, 69.287 (Records of Attorney General Brownlee), c.6.

<sup>13</sup> See the *Grande Prairie Herald*, 8 November, 1921.

<sup>14</sup> See PAA, 72.26 (Alberta Attorney General Criminal Case Files), file 5483.

<sup>15</sup> See the *Grande Prairie Herald*, 30 May, 1924.

<sup>16</sup> PAA, 72.26, file 5483.

<sup>17</sup> See Nobby's file on his World War II service in NAC, National Personal Records Center, Regimental number K-90051.

<sup>18</sup> *Wagon Trails Grown Over*, p.33.



Francophone Settlers near Dreau, Alberta, c.1914 (between Girouxville and Falher).  
Photo courtesy of Provincial Archives of Alberta Ob.13070