

ALBERTA
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Relatively Speaking

Journal of the Alberta Genealogical Society ® 1973

In This Issue: President's Message; Your Bread Is So Good It Tastes Like Angel Food Cake; My Serendipitous Story; A Feast of Food
Glorious Food and Family History; Ukrainian Feasts; Themes for May 2025; Why did they let the turkey join the band?; Sustenance and
Subsistence; A Life to Embrace; Homegrown Hero: The short intense life of Uncle Geoff; Alfred Scott and Arthur Pettifor: Fellow RCAF
Airmen; ABCs of Genealogy; Gen Faire & AGM 2025; The Lawrence Family, I Remember; Spinning Webs; Index.



Ruby Morris drives a tractor near Edmonton in 1943, when high school students helped with the harvest to assist the war effort. Ruby's daughter, Janine Carroll, recalls how she came across this photo in the book titled Alberta 100 Years a Home, and the memories it raised about her grandfather's Rabbit Hill farm, starting on page 8.

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RELATIVELY SPEAKING

Mission Statement

Relatively Speaking is the quarterly Journal of the Alberta Genealogical Society whose purpose is to support the goals of the Society by providing:

- a regular, attractive, high-quality periodical
- articles of genealogical and/or historical interest
- genealogical articles written by youth
- information on family history, genealogy resources, methodology, research tips and collaborative events
- timely information regarding major AGS events and Conferences

The Publication

RELATIVELY SPEAKING is produced by a team of volunteers, and uses contributions submitted by members and supporters of the Alberta Genealogical Society.

RELATIVELY SPEAKING is published and mailed on or about the 15th of February, May, August and November. Closing dates for receiving contributions are the 15th of December, March, June and September.

We accept contributions on a wide variety of topics that will be of interest to anyone researching their family history and that are appropriate to our Mission Statement and theme of the issue. We especially welcome those with an Alberta connection.

Final authority for acceptance or rejection of material rests with the Editor and Ad hoc Editorial Committee. Neither the Alberta Genealogical Society nor ***RELATIVELY SPEAKING*** assumes any responsibility for errors or opinions on the part of contributors.

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In This Issue

As we enter 2025, our first issue of *Relatively Speaking* explores memories of food and sustenance and the traditions that connect families throughout the years, whether past or present.

Céleste Plamondon-Zurbrigg, whose great-grandfather founded the hamlet of Plamondon, relates her forebears' relationship with Métis homesteaders and the bounty of the land in the prairie and woodlands of east-central Alberta, while Janine Carroll recalls her chance re-encounter with her mother's childhood as a 15-year-old helping with the harvest – and the memories of her grandfather's farm that encounter generated.

Sharing quotes from Sioux Chef Sean Sherman and others, John Althouse relates his Ukrainian and Volga German food traditions and the importance of acknowledging the universal qualities inherent to all food traditions. And sharing their own memories, Sharon Aney and Pam Cooke welcome us into their Ukrainian and Indigenous feast traditions, respectively, for Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving, while Ging Wei Wong recounts his father's contribution to the legacy of Edmonton's Chinese market gardens—so integral to the city's food history. And referencing another kind of sustenance, in Suzanne Maynard's account of her great aunt from Montreal we learn about this remarkable woman's life of Christian service as Sister St. Irene with the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Mary Leah Milligan de Zwart relates the poignant story of her uncle who died in action with the RCAF, and her family's Dutch connection that led to a photo of the gravestone marking his burial place, while in another chance discovery, David Scott sends out a request to the AGS membership regarding a photo of his father and a fellow author's WWII ancestor.

And to wrap up the theme of food and provisions, two descendants of Sheridan Lawrence share their memories of the legacy left by this northern Alberta pioneer who "created a family operation so vast it ran from fur trading to operating a power plant ...".

So much of the appeal of each *Relatively Speaking* is due to the dedication of volunteers, to whom I am most grateful. But it would not be the engaging journey it is without the authors. Thank you for another amazing collection of stories.

Kate Wilson, Editor

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President's Message

by Lianne Kruger



Experts say the most important word we hear is our name. I believe the second phrase would be "Supper is ready".

When I was young, I would go with my mother to visit the parents of her close friend. Her parents' house smelled strange to me. I did not like the smell but I did not know why it smelled that way. I now know it was their cooking, and to others who love German food, they would love the smell. I grew up in an Irish-Scottish home where no spice was used except salt. I remember when my grandfather got sick, he would have a little pepper because he could no longer have salt. I took Home Economics class in high school. The only recipe I remember cooking was meat with green bell peppers. I had never tasted them before and they were wonderful.

The first time I met my mother-in-law, she offered me some ice cream. I said, *no thank you*. She was from South Africa and ice cream was her favourite food. Obviously, she let me marry her son anyway. My tastes have changed since I got married. It took a few years to adjust my taste buds to handle curry and other spicy foods, but now I enjoy and appreciate these tastes. Was it a change in my palate or would I have liked these flavours as a child but just didn't have the opportunity to taste them.

My father-in-law lived in the Netherlands during WWII. He starved. The only food he got, when he had food, was potatoes. I was surprised when I learned this because I knew how much he loved potatoes. I did understand why he would always plant potatoes. It gave him a feeling of security knowing there was food when needed.

These are a few of my life history stories related to food. Is there a smell that reminds you of a person or an event? What is your favourite food, when did you first taste it, or when did it become your favourite? As you read the stories shared in this journal, I hope you think of some of your own stories and record your and your family's food history, as they may give insights that may not be recorded in other stories.

Thank you to all the volunteers that help to make AGS great. Thank you members for coming to the meetings and supporting our activities and asking questions and sharing your stories. I hope to see you at the AGS Gen Faire and AGM in Red Deer on April 26, 2025.

Happy New Year!

RS



AGS HAS MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU TO HELP

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VOLUNTEERS

UNPAID NOT BECAUSE
THEY'RE WORTHLESS, BUT
BECAUSE THEY'RE
PRICELESS!



Céleste Plamondon - Zurbrigg was raised on an isolated farm on the banks of the La Biche River, 12 km north of the hamlet of Plamondon, which is 220 km north of Edmonton. Her great-grandfather Joseph Plamondon was the founder of Plamondon.

After high school Céleste moved to Edmonton, and after a 35-year career in information technology, retired in 2009. She cycles and loves to create theme-related routes. She helped the Plamondon Museum acquire a website and contributed to its digital library.

Your Bread Is So Good, It Tastes Like Angel Food Cake!

by Céleste Plamondon-Zurbrigg

My great-grandfather, French Canadian Joseph Plamondon, founded the hamlet Plamondon in 1908, when he led family and friends from the east to homestead in the west. They arrived by train to Morinville. It took them 13 days to travel 300 kilometres by cart and horse/oxen. They settled 22 kms west of the lakeside Lac La Biche Mission.

When they arrived on July 28, the Métis had already settled in “river lots” along the lake. The French had brought the river lot system with them from France. Though these lots were along the lake edge, they were still called river lots. When the Federal surveyors arrived, they honoured the river lots and created the township system next to them.

The pioneers set to work cutting trees to build their log shacks. Most of the Métis spoke French. They helped the newcomers by teaching them how to survive the first winter, as well as supplying them with fish and wild meat.

After this beginning, my parents were born in 1926 and 1931. In 1949 they were one of the last homesteaders to acquire land in the area. The isolated homestead was located along the La Biche River 12 kilometres north of Plamondon. Thus, they were the next generation of homesteaders. They only acquired electricity in 1961 and plumbing in 1964, when they built a bungalow to replace their initial shack.

Meat



Albin, Céleste's dad, killed this deer in 1957 for sustenance. Wild meat was eaten by many in the community.

Sustenance was from the land, hunting and the occasional trip to the general store in the hamlet. Mom learned to cook various wild meat like moose, deer, fish, bear and even porcupine on one occasion. It had been roadkill, which Dad cut up and told her it was a bear meat. After supper she was told the truth!

In the early years, Dad would go into the nearby forests during moose hunting season and kill a moose. He'd walk back home, saddle up the horse, and have the horse skid

the moose back home. After gutting and skinning it, he'd hang it in a cold shed for a week or two. Then we all had our jobs to do when it was time to cut it up, wrap it and label the moose meat.

We ate a lot of wild meat, because killing one of our pigs or cows for us to eat was a loss of farm revenue. Nevertheless, the periodic slaughtering of a pig was normally done when Dad had someone to help him kill it. They then boiled water and poured some of it into a 45-gallon barrel. Dad hooked the pig to a tractor with a front-end-loader and hoisted the carcass into the air, with the head hanging down. After slashing the throat, blood was collected in a bucket. The carcass was then dipped into the hot water so that the hair could be scrapped off. After the butchering was done, I remember my brother and I helping with the packaging.

In addition to all the regular cuts of meat, Dad smoked the belly section to create bacon. Mom made boudin (blood pudding) and Dad made the headcheese. Pork also gave us our French Canadian traditional tourtière (meat pie), for which the meat was minced. I will never forget my 16th birthday when on a Saturday, we butchered 80 chickens. My grandparents helped us. So, on a snowy November day, the six of us all had various duties. I remember seeing the chickens jumping around after the heads were cut off spewing blood all over the snow. They were dunked in hot water, which enabled the feathers to be pulled off easily. They were gutted and the pin feathers burned off over the stove. They were packaged and put in the freezer. So, what did we have for supper? You guessed it....chicken!

One dark rainy night in the early 1960s, we were driving home in our 1930 Ford Model A. Dad had purchased it as a used car, but due to rust on the cab, he had replaced it with a plywood cab that he had built. As a result, the car was light. Cows had escaped from a farmer's broken fence. After hitting a cow, our car was on top of her as she took her last breaths, causing us to move up and down. My Uncle Donald and his family were in their car behind us. Thus, a deal was made where the cow was purchased from the farmer. My parents, my uncle and my aunt were butchering, wrapping and labeling till the wee hours of the morning. What did we have for supper the next day? You guessed it....beef!

Water Glassing

My grandmother preserved fresh eggs using the Water Glassing method: calcium hydroxide is mixed with water in a crock and the fresh eggs are carefully placed in. This method effectively seals the egg shell pores, thereby sealing out oxygen and moisture. The lack of oxygen inhibits bacterial growth, preventing spoiling. It is said that "fresh" eggs can be kept up to 18 months.

Breakfast Picnic

In 1963 when I was eight years old, Uncle Oral, Auntie Jeanne and family moved up north to Fort Smith. There was a farewell party at Alex Plamondon's place the night before they left. In the morning, I was woken up very early by Mom. This was in the summer and it was dark. That's how early it was! We were to surprise Uncle Oral and Auntie Jeanne on the road a short while after they had left Plamondon to start their long trek to the Northwest Territories. I remember when we arrived at the surprise spot, the road was very narrow. We were at the bottom of a hill. There was a group of us. Cooking-bacon smell permeated the air, coming from a grill on a Coleman stove. Food came out and was placed on portable tables. I was so excited as the tension mounted of when we would see them crest



Lena, Céleste's mom, made this picnic food in 1984, including two ice bowls. One has a bottle of wine, the other a fruit salad. Both have flowers that were incorporated into the ice.

over the hill. Finally, after what seemed to be an eternity, we saw their loaded truck coming down. We all ran onto the road jumping and waving our hands.

This is what Uncle Oral later wrote in a family history book, *“As we approached the Athabasca road, we were astonished to see a bunch of BANDITS... blocking the road. We approached cautiously and soon recognized the faces of our friends and relatives! Early in the morning, they had boarded Rosaire Plamondon’s school bus and had come to have a farewell breakfast with us.”*

Summer

Every year, in the early spring, I was sent to pick fresh dandelion leaves for salad.

I remember picking various berries with Mom, my brother, and my maternal grandparents. We all had tin pails (usually empty lard containers) that we looped through our belts. When we started, the berries made a sound of “ping, ping” as they hit the bottom of the pail. Then as it filled up, the sound became “thud, thud”. The chokecherries had a particular smell to them. Compared to other berries, they were not good to eat fresh. However, after Mom made jam with them, they were delicious.

My highlight every summer was when my cousins arrived for one month from Edmonton. Dad’s brother Don and his wife Barb had 10 children. They bought some land next to ours and every summer for many years, they spent the one month in a small cabin, a short walking distance from our house. The older cousins were made to work in the fields. What were the rest asked to do? We were sent to pick enough wild strawberries for 16 people to eat for dessert with farm cream! That’s a lot of little strawberries!

What else can we do with farm cream? Ice cream! Dad had resurrected an old ice cream maker. Thus, because there were many hands, they were used to turn the handle to create fresh ice cream thanks to our cows.

Garden

Do you know how long 46 metres is? It is about the length of a 15-story building placed on its side. For a young child and certainly later on as a teenager, it was a very long way to go to the garden. I envied the city dwellers who had their gardens just outside their back door!

But not for us! No siree! We had lots of space on our farm, so we were going to darn well use it! When Mom would ask me to harvest a few vegetables for that night’s supper, the long walk across the yard felt like an imposition. Upon my return, I would stop at the tap on the outside of our house and wash off the worst of the dirt off the vegetables. This was followed by a closer cleaning with a brush in the kitchen sink. Finally, the vegetables were cut, cooked and voilà, eaten within a couple of hours after harvesting.

Back in the 1960s I don’t think we had even heard of the word “organic”, but there it was, we had an organic garden. A garden that measured about 13 x 10 metres. A garden of misery, when we had to do the inevitable weeding. Not the activity my brother and I wanted to do on a hot summer day, when we preferred the cooling water of the river. The space in between the rows were wide to accommodate a rototiller. That was Dad’s domain. But we still needed to get close to the valued plants and weed out the unwanted ones. But like all kids, we did feel somewhat compensated by eating peas, carrots or beans while we worked. However, it was never overdone as Mom kept an eye on us!

Then there was the inevitable canning and freezing. In addition to the garden goods being preserved, horseradish grew wild on the riverbank and Mom found a recipe to make and can the sauce.

Christmas

Our family, along with my mom’s siblings and their family, all lived on farms and our grandparents lived in the hamlet of Plamondon. On Christmas Eve, each family would show up at church for the Midnight Mass. Sometimes we would go a bit earlier to my grandparents and drop off food and the presents that the parents were giving to their kids.

Then around 2:00 am we would leave the church and arrive at my grandparents' house. We kids would unwrap our presents and would play with them, while the mothers got the food ready. Then our Réveillon meal was served. The Réveillon word comes from réveil, which means waking. This means staying up all night to eat and be merry.



Céleste's mom made this yule log cake for Christmas 1995.

The tourtière was the item that we all looked forward to eating with cranberry sauce on top. Vegetables, potatoes and gelatin salads accompanied the meal. For dessert, Mom was famous for her Bûche de Noël (jelly roll that is rolled and decorated like a log). We also looked forward to our grandmother's Chiffon Cake.

After we ate, my dad and his brothers-in-law would play music and we would dance and sing. It was not unusual to arrive home at 7:00 am to go to bed. We would usually wake up at 2:00 in the afternoon and return to my grandparents' house for a quiet Christmas supper and we'd all go home early.

Then on Boxing Day and the next day, we'd visit many extended relatives, usually staying a couple of hours before moving on to the next. My mom's birthday was December 27, so by the time I was around 10 years old, I would bake a cake and bring it with us so that she had a birthday celebration wherever we were, after supper. Over these two days there was a lot of music played.

Other Foods

I remember eating wheat porridge with the whole wheat from our farm. We didn't have it too often, because it took a long time to cook.

We all loved our mom's cooking. Whether it was birthdays, Christmas or Easter suppers, she was never afraid to try new recipes. When pizza was introduced to North America, she took to it right away. She taught herself to cook Chinese food when that came in vogue. We looked forward to eating her 'chow mein' recipe, which became a Christmas tradition. It consisted of bacon, sauerkraut, mushrooms and rice. After I left home, I learned that chow mein is actually a noodle dish. I never had the heart to tell her!

Mom knew what kind of mushrooms to pick around the farm, and she made mushroom soup a few times.

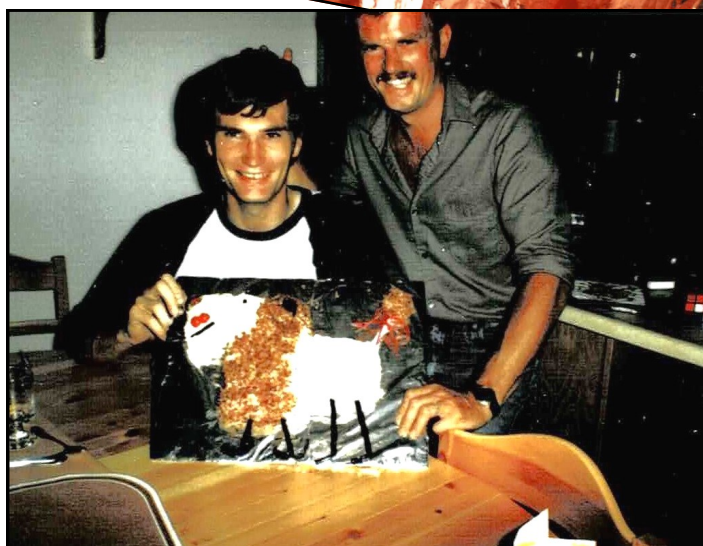
Dad would occasionally make himself an onion sandwich. He sliced the onions thinly and placed them on bread that he had spread with mayonnaise. Onions weren't only good for eating. Mom would put an onion poultice on our chests when we had colds. It was smelly and we did not like it.

Occasionally we had fried Jackfish eggs that were cooked in butter. Mom told us we were eating "caviar". Coming home after school we always looked forward to some snacks. We especially liked it when Mom baked pies. We knew she'd have baked the leftover dough in small pieces, topped with cinnamon and sugar for our snack. Dad loved desserts. Between meals if he was hungry and there was no leftover dessert, he would place bread cubes in a bowl, sprinkle brown sugar and pour some milk. That was his comfort food.

Mom was a wonderful baker. After we had left home, no matter what age we were, we never turned down offers of goodies to take home. This was especially so regarding cornmeal muffins that she made for her son-in-law, my husband John.

Cakes

Céleste made this cut-up cake in 1981 for her Aunty Alvena's birthday. Alvena loved butterflies.



Céleste made this cut-up lion cake in 1984 for her husband John (sitting) and his brother Doug. Their August birthdays are three days apart.



Lena, Céleste's mom, made this Easter Bonnet cake in 1983. Céleste's cousin Emilie is "wearing" it on her head.

For several years Mom made theme cakes for birthdays and special occasions. She used a "*Animal Cut-Up Cakes*" booklet put out by Baker's Coconut ([vintage-animal-cut-up-cakes](https://www.etsy.com/ca/listing/1413665473/vintage-animal-cut-up-cakes-16-cake))¹. I still have that booklet today. Of course for Easter, the bunny rabbit cake had coconut fur held down by icing. Another Easter cake was shaped like a bonnet. In the photo, my cousin is "wearing" the cake on her head.

Keeping with the cake theme, as I got older, I became responsible for making the desserts while Mom made the regular meals. One day, when Aunty Lucille and her daughters came for a visit, I was busy making a cake using the hand mixer. I had turned my head to talk or listen and before I knew it, my long hair got caught by the beaters and my head got pulled down. I shut off the hand mixer and following a lot of shrieking and crying, my doughy hair was freed. I washed my hair, but I don't remember what happened to the cake dough!

Mom was renowned for baking good bread. In fact, one of my cousins who was a teenager at the time said, "*Auntie Lena, your bread is so good, it tastes like angel food cake!*"

¹ <https://www.etsy.com/ca/listing/1413665473/vintage-animal-cut-up-cakes-16-cake>

RS



Janine Carroll participates in two seasonal activities in retirement. She immerses herself in her family's history during winter, researching and writing. As a third generation Edmontonian, she feels a strong connection. In summer, she devotes her time to her garden.

For nearly two decades, Janine has been an active member of the AGS Camrose Branch where she enjoys sharing stories, laughter, and research techniques with fellow members and looks forward to every meeting and gathering.

My Serendipitous Story

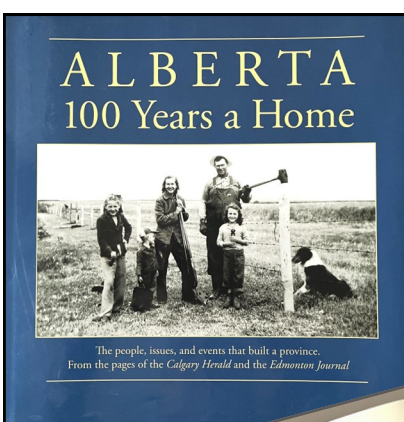
by Janine Carroll

First published in the Roots and Shoots Newsletter Summer 2024 issue, Janine's article was prompted by the theme of My Serendipitous Find. It is re-printed with permission from the AGS Camrose Branch.

Several years ago one of our dedicated Branch members, Bev Webster, frequently visited the Centra Cam recycling depot, where some helpful employees would set aside discarded history books. Bev would tote those books, often a dozen or more, to our meetings where they were spread out on a table at the back of the room, and those attending would have the opportunity to browse. I think Bev enjoyed doing this for the environment and for us—we did appreciate all the fine free books!

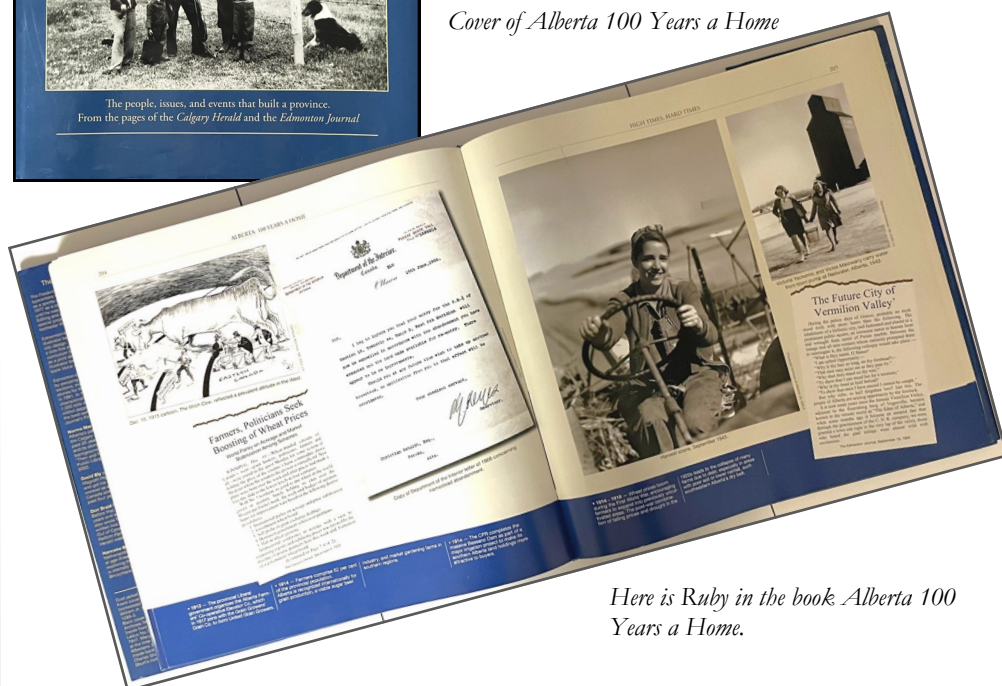
I was particularly drawn to Alberta and Edmonton history books and accumulated many from the Bev recycling service. Alas, COVID hit, and the recycling depot changed its collection habits, so the books were no longer available.

I recall one memorable meeting. I had gathered a couple of books. One was enormous, heavy and beautiful—it appeared to be brand new. I carried it to the table where I sat, worried that I looked like a book hog. "Someone else may want this incredible book," I thought and decided to thumb through it and return it to the back table.



I pressed my thumb randomly between two pages and gingerly opened it. What I saw made me gasp aloud. Staring at me from page 205 was my youthful, tanned mother. Dressed in overalls, she drove a tractor and gripped the steering wheel confidently, a relaxed, joyful smile creasing her features.

Cover of Alberta 100 Years a Home



Here is Ruby in the book Alberta 100 Years a Home.

The photo's depth of field divulges a talented photographer. I had seen the photo before.

Mom and her family were proud of the page six article appearing in the *Edmonton Bulletin* on Saturday, September 25, 1943. Under the title of "Harvesting Operations in Full Swing on Alberta Farms" appeared several photos taken at my grandfather John Morris' Rabbit Hill farm—a massive field peppered with wheat stooks, the image of my beautiful 15-year-old mom Ruby Morris, another of her younger brother "Ronnie" Morris, 13, at the controls of a binder and lastly, a photo of my great uncle Oscar, posing with his two arms full of bound wheat.

How the Zillebeke connection occurred was explained to me: my grandfather, John Morris, enlisted on March 27, 1916 (lying about his age as he was 17 years and four months old), joining the 194th Edmonton Highlanders Battalion, along with his brothers, Oscar and Percy. John served in France with the 49th Battalion and was injured during the Fifth Battle of Ypres on September 30, 1918 – just 43 days before the armistice between Germany and the Allies ended the horrific four-year war.

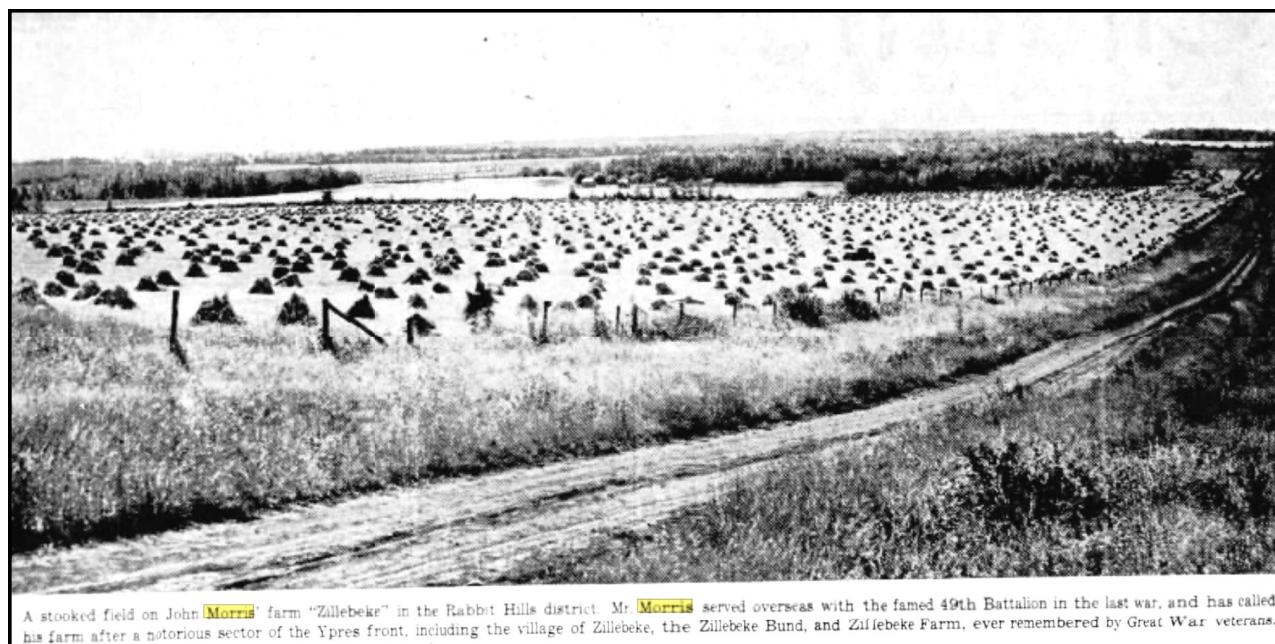
The story my mom shared with me was about how a piece of shrapnel, flying from a nearby bomb explosion, became embedded in Grandpa's shoulder, rendering his arm useless. He walked several kilometres, along with other soldiers,



"Ronnie" Morris, 13, in the 1943 *Edmonton Bulletin* article.



Oscar, the author's great uncle, is shown with armfuls of bound wheat in the *Edmonton Bulletin* article.



"A stooked field on John Morris' farm "Zillebeke" in the Rabbit Hill District. Mr. Morris served overseas with the famed 49th Battalion in the last war, and has called his farm after a notorious sector of the Ypres front, including the village of Zillebeke, the Zillebeke Bund¹ and Zillebeke Farm, ever remembered by Great War veterans."

leaning on each other as they grappled through the fields called Flanders, thick with mud. They struggled against winter winds, icy cold rain and their injuries to seek medical attention just behind the front lines. They walked to the village of Zillebeke.

A British medical unit, likely set up in draughty tents (or with no cover at all) was in Zillebeke. It was vastly understaffed, with injured soldiers pouring in. The diagnosis was quick and impersonal when the overworked, likely exhausted physician examined my grandfather. "Take it off," the doctor growled and moved on to the next bloodied soldier, so the story goes.

"But I'm a farmer," my grandfather cried. "What good is a one-armed farmer?"

Villagers, helping the British as they could, convinced the doctor that they would clean the wound and keep it clean for as long as the young Canadian farmer was with them. The doctor removed the shrapnel and saved the arm, and the villagers kept the wound clean. Grandpa promised them and himself that he would honour their compassion, so when he returned home, he named his farm Zillebeke. As family historians know, stories can take on a life of their own. What parts of this story are authentic, and what parts have been embellished? I'm not sure.

I don't know how long the villagers cared for him. He returned to England and then to Canada, but not for several months as he underwent many operations and convalesced at the Canadian Convalescent Hospital. The wound wouldn't heal. When Grandpa returned to Edmonton in May 1919, he underwent one more surgery at the University Hospital, where a chunk of uniform was extracted.

He finally healed, though the shoulder ached often until the day he died. Mom remembers him tucking his arm into his overalls, hoeing long rows in the garden and doing other chores with one arm.

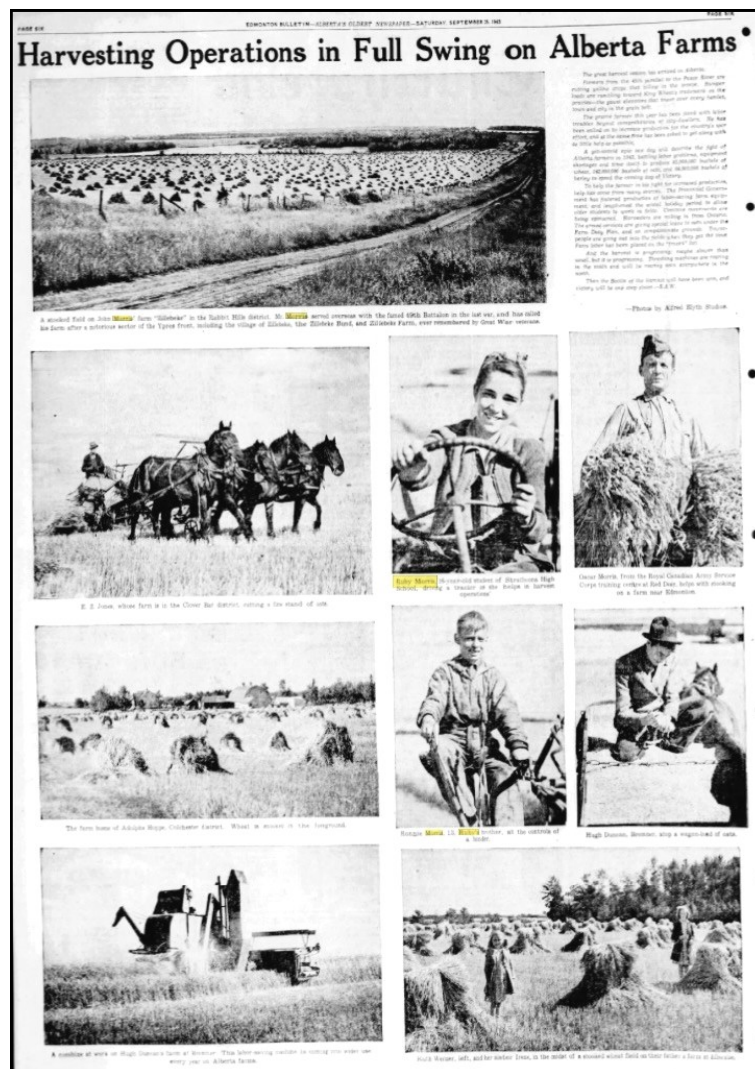
"The great harvest season has begun," declares the *Edmonton Bulletin* article's author. It was a bumper season across Alberta, with high expectations to support the war effort. All this with a labour shortage.

Grandpa and his brothers farmed numerous quarters and I grew up hearing stories about the sizeable work crews who came to help with the harvesting. During the war years, high schools delayed their September opening so students could work on farms. Mom and her five siblings stepped up to fill the void left by men serving their country overseas.

to cease their punishment of the Germans." On September 30 "wintry winds and rains, sweeping in from the North Sea," drenched the men, and chilled them to the bone. Under that date Mr. Philip Gibbs cabled to the *New York Times*:

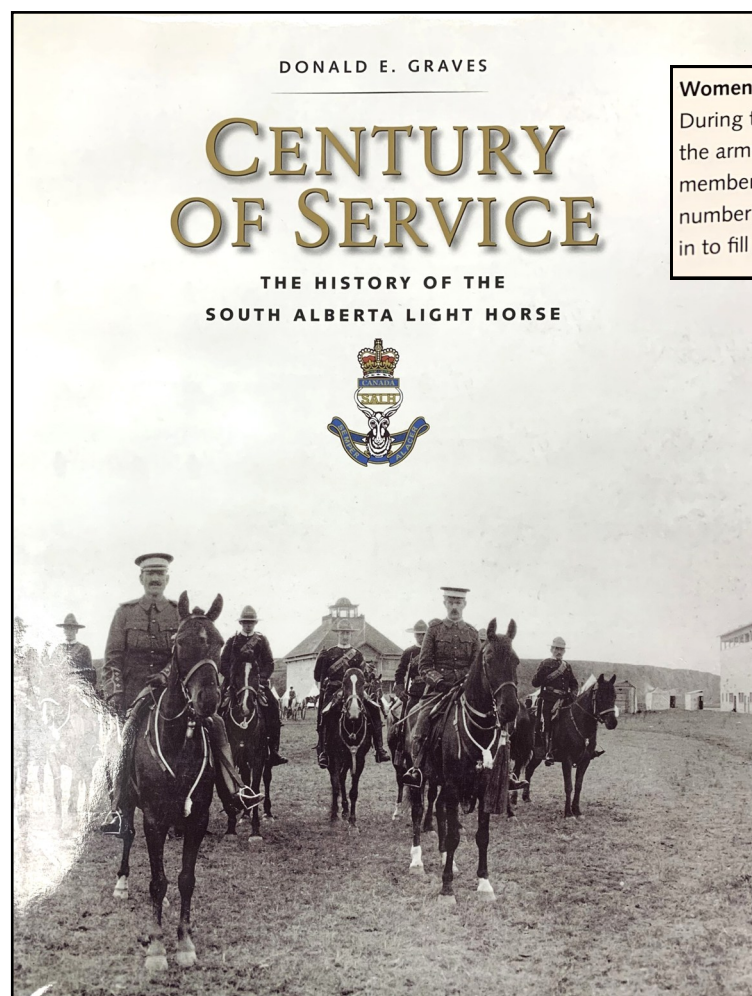
There was wild weather last night, with a gale of wind blowing and heavy rainstorms over the battlefields. . . . It was bitter cold for the brave troops, and this morning some of them I met had chattering teeth, after a night without sleep, but they endure these discomforts bravely, and the vision of victory keeps them warm in soul, if not in body.

Article reporting the weather the day that John Morris was injured in Belgium.



The Edmonton Bulletin article about students working on the farm during WWII.

The photographer and writer stopped randomly at the edge of the field where Mom, Ron and Uncle Oscar worked. They searched for photos highlighting how students were staying home to help on the farm, and how the Alberta harvest was contributing positively to the war effort. They travelled to several other communities to collect photos for the spread—Bremner, Colchester, Ellerslie and Clover Bar.



Women played an important role

During the Second World War, Canadian women played a crucial role in the armed forces, industry and agriculture. As the number of male family members engaged in farm work in Alberta dropped by 13.3% and the number of male farm hands by 40% during the conflict, women stepped in to fill the gap. PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF ALBERTA, BL. 639/51

*At left, a section of the book, *Century of Service*.*

Mom attended high school for half a day throughout the war years due to the labour shortage (which also included the teaching profession).

During the winter months, she worked afternoons and evenings at the University of Alberta Hospital in the dietary kitchen.

With my serendipitous discovery of my mom's photograph, I kept the book.

The book *Century of Service* measures one foot high and, when open, spans an impressive 25 inches from edge to edge, weighing a couple of pounds. Happy 40th Kevin is scrawled on the inside cover.

It commemorates Alberta's 100th year as a province, published in 2005 by the Edmonton

Journal Group Inc. and Calgary Herald Group Inc.; Editor Peter Callum, Designer Rick Pape; Researchers Patricia Beuerlein and Norma Marr.

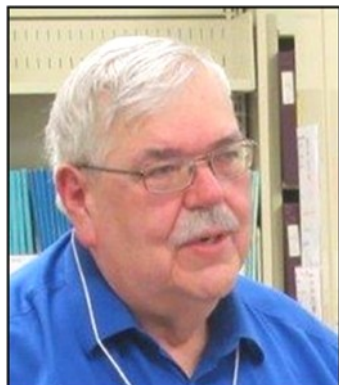
Branch member Norm Prestage discovered the same photo of my mom, Ruby Morris, in the book *Century of Service, The History of the South Alberta Light Horse*.

FOOTNOTE

¹ a wall of stone or earth, built to stop an area being covered by a large amount of water

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/bund?q=Bund>

RS



John Althouse was born in Canora, Saskatchewan but moved with his parents and brothers to Edmonton in 1956. After graduating from the University of Alberta he taught for Edmonton Catholic Schools for 35 years. In retirement, he was able to begin seriously researching his family roots in Canada, the USA, Germany, Volga German Russia and Ukraine. John does presentations for AGS and other groups; has moderated the German and Post Scripts Special Interest Groups; instructed Tracing Your Family Tree courses and contributed to *Relatively Speaking*, the *Saskatchewan Genealogical Society Bulletin* and other genealogical publications. His true passion is writing about the history of our Prairie Provinces.

A Feast of Food, Glorious Food and Family History

by John Althouse

In their book *Reconciling History – A Story of Canada*, Jody Wilson-Raybould and Roshan Danesh wrote, “We all have knowledge passed on to us about our people, and with it a responsibility to share that knowledge with the generations to come. Transmitting this history helps us be connected across generations, and rooted to the community, cultures, and ways of life that are vital to shaping who we are and how we live our lives.”

History and traditional culture are inexorably tied to food. Significant events most often involve food. Food traditions are a great way to understand another culture. The Sioux chef Sean Sherman states, “Food is the one thing that centers all of us. It’s the one thing that we all have in common, no matter who we are.”¹

Our ancestors travelled to North America at various times in the past. With them these people brought their traditional food practices. By learning their food traditions, we can learn not only about ancestors who came before us, but also about ourselves.

A family’s food traditions are vital parts of their culture. Elders of a family, most often its female members, attempt to pass on their food traditions to their children. In both my Althouse and Sattler families, my two grandmothers instructed their children in the proper preparation of foods from their traditional cultures, Ukrainian and Volga German. In both cases, their efforts were less than successful for two very different reasons.

Grandma Althouse’s cooking lessons were memorable. Even years after her death on those special rare occasions when several of her daughters would gather, they would invariably discuss their mother’s efforts in teaching them to cook. From their description of events, it appears that while Grandma was an excellent cook herself, she lacked the skill and more importantly patience to be a skilled instructor.

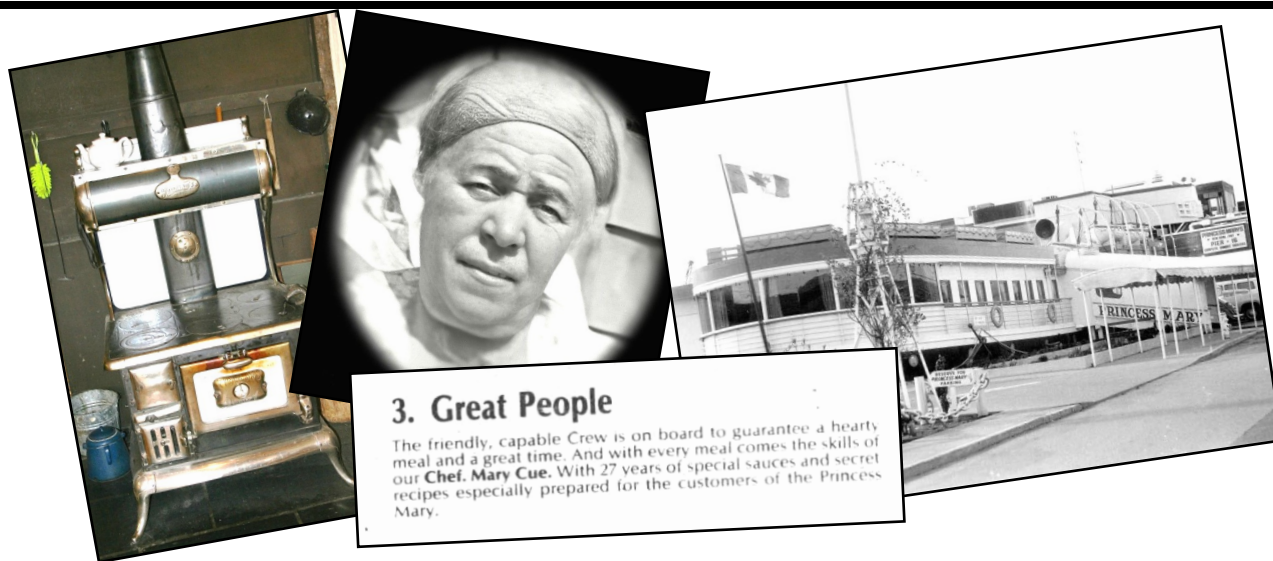


History and traditional culture are inexorably tied to food.



Aunts Ramona, Victoria, and Mary discuss Grandma’s cooking lessons (1976).

Grandma did not use a cook book or even have her recipes written down. She did not use standard measurements. To be fair, it is likely that she had never heard of these; while for her daughters, they learned these standardized measurements at school. Grandma used a system of her own creation derived from years of experience. One coffee cup



Grandma's methods. It's unlikely her recipes could be duplicated today.

Grandma Althouse, her food expertise.

Aunt Mary was Chef at Princess Mary Restaurant, above, in Victoria, BC.

which had lost its handle was one measuring tool used for larger dry measures. Grandma “guesstimated” smaller amounts, “*about this much of this*” as she dropped the relevant amount into her mixing bowl.

Why her daughters could not grasp how much “*about this much*” was, baffled her. After all, Grandma found this easy why couldn't her daughters? Many of these cooking sessions ended in cross words and tears. (I must look to see if Grandma Althouse may have had an ancestral tie to Gordan Ramsey.)

A sad reality was that soon no one would be able to duplicate the taste of her delicious foods, because wood fired stoves, farm fresh cream, garden fresh vegetables and other essentials of her pantry and kitchen became more difficult to secure and use. In addition, the work involved in making many foods using her methods was labour intensive and not ideal for a modern and highly mobile world.

However, despite my aunts' inauspicious start in the kitchen, they all became excellent cooks as adults. Each of them prepared wonderful meals which I had the privilege of enjoying. Four of them worked in the food industry. After a short sojourn in the Royal Canadian Navy near the end of World War II, my youngest aunt, Ramona, worked for a time as a waitress in the Palace Café, then a favourite gathering and eating place in our hometown. Aunt Vicky seemed to prefer living in a trailer on a construction site where her husband Oscar was the foreman, to living in her house. On the site, she worked at times as a cook and at others simply prepared an occasional meal of hearty food needed to sustain a good day's work for the crew. Aunt Frances worked for a time in a cafeteria connected to the British Columbia Legislature Building. My eldest aunt, Mary, returned to work after raising her family. She was hired by the Princess Mary Restaurant, regarded as the finest place to dine on seafood in Victoria. She became chef there and introduced several dishes for which the restaurant was known. Each of my aunts became an excellent cook in her own right. While each could prepare some of the recipes of their mother, they developed recipes of their own often from outside the traditional foods of our ancestral culture.

With my maternal family, Grandma Sattler also was the primary instructor in the traditional methods of food preparation. She imparted these to her three eldest daughters Amalia, Lydia, and Pauline who had come to Canada with her, my grandfather, and their brother Alex in 1911.

However, my grandmother's early death in February 1920 prevented her from passing these on to her younger daughters, my mother Mary and her sister Kay. In Aunt Lydia's memoir written over 60 years after my grandmother's death, we get a few short glimpses of the Sattler family food traditions. With the passage of years, marriages to spouses from other cultures, and the mobility of the family, traditions often become blended with

others, abandoned, and even forgotten. My mother's history illustrates this well. She did learn to prepare some simpler Volga German recipes – kartoffeln und glace (German potatoes and dumplings) and various fruit kuchen.

As her mother died when my mother was six-and-a-half years of age, and as she lived at home very little after, she did not learn the more complicated ones – bierocks, brenich (a holiday shortbread cookie) or krebber (a fried pastry).

My mother lived in town while going to school, boarding and doing light housework for two families – the Sutherlands and the Messners, both of British heritage. So, she became quite expert at making butter tarts, Yorkshire Pudding, turkey with dressing, or Christmas pudding with sauce. She gradually forgot some of the Volga German food traditions. We were puzzled because her father, my grandfather, would not eat tomato in any form. Later, I would find that it was a belief in the Volga German culture that the tomato was “the devil's apple.” Yet, my mother was unaware of this and employed tomatoes in her salads, pasta sauces, over holubtsi (cabbage rolls) and in other ways in her cuisine. After leaving school at age 15, my mother worked as a nursing aide at the local hospital where she lived in residence. The women she worked and lived with were of British and Ukrainian cultural backgrounds. So, once again, she had very little exposure to traditional Volga German food, aside from on one of her infrequent trips home or to visit one of her older sisters.

When my father came into the picture, my mother's cuisine was modified by his preferences. My mother noted whimsically later in life that their marriage may well have ended early due to a lemon pie which was not to my father's liking. When asked what he thought of the supposed culinary masterpiece, he replied honestly but rather tactlessly, oblivious to the effects of his critique on his recent bride. After a few tears, my mother sought help from a rather unlikely source, her mother-in-law. Now, based on my earlier revelations, this would have seemed to be courting disaster. However Mary, my mother, unlike my father's sisters, seemed to benefit from my grandmother's tutelage. Not only did my mother learn to make a lemon pie that would win over my father's taste buds, but also learned to make some of the foods that he had been raised on and enjoyed. Unlike my grandmother, Mom did use measurement instruments and her trusty *CCF Cook Book*, quite tattered and annotated in later years to help in her kitchen, which had conveniences that Grandma Althouse's did not.



My mother Mary about the time she married my father.



Aided by her CCF Cook Book

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SAFeway

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My dad purchased quality meat at Safeway.

The marriage brought about another change in my mother's food experience. As my father was the son of a butcher, he was an advocate that a good meal must have meat, generally red meat. He believed that the meat must be of high quality. Grocery shopping became a duty of my father, especially after we moved to Edmonton. My father shopped at the same Safeway store on approximately the same day every week. There, he cultivated positive relations with store employees, particularly those employed in the meat department. Generally, he was able to find a suitable cut of meat in the display cases. However, I can remember several occasions when the butcher would ask if he was interested in a particular cut of meat and simply bring out the finest quality meat of a particular cut on a tray kept out of sight for their best customers. So, we almost always had meat of the highest quality as a component of our family meals.

All food traditions began with the hunter and gatherer, and many proceeded to include the fruits of agriculture. Even to the present day, some foods in almost all cultures continue to be gathered or acquired by hunting and fishing. This was common in three cultural traditions of my ancestors. They collected wild mushrooms, wild berries, other wild fruits, wild nuts, some greens and a variety of roots to provide for their dietary and even medicinal needs. They also occasionally killed wild game or caught fish to supplement their diet, but only in the most severe emergencies, as often they did so under the threat of severe punishment.

In the European context, most of the food of our ancestors came from the fruits of their farming. However, they were able to retain only a fraction of it after they had paid what they were required to pay to their landlords. This did not always leave enough food to provide a sound diet for their families. However, gathering, hunting, and agriculture – all were useful skills to have when pioneering on the Canadian Prairies, as they helped sustain those from distant lands during their early years.

Food traditions include methods of preserving it as well. Today, our family thinks nothing of taking food out the refrigerator or freezer. What did people do before these appliances were commonly available? My Althouse grandparents did not have electricity in their home until 1953. Yet, they kept food using a variety of means. Autumn was a busy time. Grandpa, who had been trained as a butcher in his native Germany, butchered some of the family's pigs. After the meat was cured, he took some of the meat, ground it by hand, mixed in various spices dependent on the variety of sausage he was making, and packed the resulting mixture into casings to make a variety of tasty sausages. The remainder of the meat was cut into roasts, chops and other products for use during the year. There was a porch that acted as a "cold room" where some of his products were stored for immediate use. By the early 1950s, much of the meat was stored at the local "locker plant" where a person could rent a refrigerated locker and store a supply of meat for later use.

Supplying the family with food could be tricky.

Five cows are electrocuted

CANORA, Sask., July 5 (Special).—Five cows were electrocuted during a violent windstorm.

The cows, killed in the town pasture, were the property of H. Althouse, G. Ludba, W. Bilous and H. Rewakowski, and their total value was \$500.

The five animals were electrocuted when two power poles were toppled by the wind and the fallen wires struck the cows.



A "Beef Ring" kept meat cold by being hung down the well.

Storage of food was an even greater problem on farms, where it was not always easy, convenient, or even possible to drive into the nearest town. The family of my grandfather's brother Nick Althouse and other families were involved in an endeavor that provided a solution to this problem. For years, I heard members of his family talk about a "beef ring." I had no idea what a beef ring was until I read a description of the "beef ring" written for a local history by one of Nick's daughters-in-law.

A "beef ring" consisted of twelve families who each pledged to provide one steer for a specific month of the year. Monthly, the members would gather at a shed that was reserved for this purpose. The assigned family would bring their steer, and the animal would be butchered and cut into the various roasts, steaks and other cuts of beef. Here, Nick would likely have played a significant part as he, like my grandfather, had been trained as a butcher. The meat was then divided into twelve lots, one for each member family. The allotment for the month was displayed in a cloth with twelve pockets hanging on the wall in the shed. The allotments were varied from month to month, so each family would receive an equitable supply of both the best and poorest cuts. In this way, members of the beef ring received a supply of meat readily at hand for one month, making preserving it less of a

problem. Generally, this meat was placed in a container and lowered down the family's well where it was kept cold until needed. There might be several "beef rings" functioning within an area. Later, a ring developed to provide twelve families with pork as well.

Grandma Althouse with the aid of her children took up the produce from her large gardens. The potatoes were collected and stored in the cellar in the house. Grandma took the other vegetables and fruits and canned them in mason jars. She also created a variety of jams and jellies which were placed in smaller repurposed jars. The canning was stored on shelves in the cellar below the house. I also recall there being a cabbage shredder and large earthen crocks which were used to make sauerkraut. Grandma also was an expert on natural flora that might be used either for medicinal purposes or as food. She knew which mushrooms were edible and which were not, when those that were edible were likely to appear, and where to find them. So, she would be at that place at the time when they were available and able to pick a good supply of them. One of the varieties that she particularly prized was the “true morel.” She cooked some of her collected treasure for immediate use as a side dish. However, some she saved for later use, most notably her Christmas Eve supper. She would dry a quantity of these mushrooms and store them once they had dried. As Christmas approached, she would take the dried “morels” out and place them in water for the proper amount of time to reconstitute them. Once they were ready, she would cook them.

The best moments are often those including food and family. As I noted, the occasions at which I remember many family members gathered were rare. However, the times I do remember that several of my father’s siblings and their families gathered were Grandma’s Christmas Eve suppers. There were also a cast of non-family members who simply had no family nearby at Christmas. There were wonderful joyous conversations, abundant laughter, and even a little revelry. However, the highlight of the evening was the food, a traditional Ukrainian Christmas Eve supper of twelve special meatless dishes. The ingredients were prepared in the days leading to the festive eve and demanded extensive time and effort to prepare – all the work of my grandmother. At this meal, she never sat with those assembled around the table. At the proper time, she would bring in the steaming dishes and place each on the table. She would observe if a dish was emptied, quickly remove it and refill it with more of its delicious contents and return the full dish to the table. If the diners were slow to eat or emptied their plates, Grandma would encourage them to eat more, simply imploring them, “Eat! Eat!” Her joy was seeing those gathered around the family table enjoying the fruits of her labour, finding joy in simply being together and celebrating the Holy Eve. It was only after everyone else was done eating and the empty dishes had been removed from the table that Grandma would quietly retire to the kitchen and have a quiet supper alone.

Perhaps, some of our joy at this and similar events involving food comes from simply having abundant food to eat. For my ancestors, this was not always the norm. In my ancestors’ former homelands, sufficient foods to provide for a family were often lacking. There were major famines, at times lasting for years. My Grandpa Sattler had left his parents and some siblings in Russia but remained in touch with them through letters over



Sattler Family Reunion, 1982: Front left to right: Mary, my mother; Aunts Pauline, Lydia, Kay. Rear: Aunt Irene, Uncle Fred, and Aunt Eva. Family events center on food.



Severe Famine in Volga Russia, 1921 – 1925, advertisement

several years. In 1921, a major famine began that ravaged the Volga German settlements. An elderly family member recalled that in one of the last letters received from the relatives in Russia shortly after this, they noted that they had some domestic fowl hidden and could not openly cook them as other villagers would likely report such a transgression. Shortly after this letter, all communication from family members still in Russia ceased. One can only speculate on what may have happened to them until corroborating evidence is found.

The importance of food in family history

Where does one include food traditions in a written family history? While important, they are difficult to include within a chronologically organized history. Some writers have included them near a family history's final pages as a separate chapter or epilogue. Other writers have included family recipes and food traditions within a separate "family cook book". These cook books are projects which may be taken on by collected family members for a family reunion. However, these alone are not as effective transcripts of family history as they might be. A family cook book needs one vital addition with each recipe, a family memory involving that food. Whether I am recording my mother's Christmas pudding sauce recipe, Aunt Molly's ammonia cookies recipe, Auntie Mary's clam chowder recipe, Auntie Vickie's baked beans recipe or the dishes Grandma Althouse prepared for her Christmas Eve supper, I need to include a family story or memory centered on the subject recipe or tradition.



No matter the culture, food and associated traditions make us who we are.

who they are. This is one way of getting to better know a generally under-represented half of our family, our female relatives who have traditionally been charged with responsibilities related to our foods and food traditions. However, our food traditions and existing food culture also provide additional doors that allow us another avenue for seeing who each of us is, and better seeing our place within a family.

It is also useful to include a photograph to accompany the story and recipe. The photographs may be the major person around whom the story revolves, the scene in which it occurred, the plated food, the food in preparation, or any other photo that might fit the recipe or story.

As stated by The Sioux Chef, "*Authentic food is as important to a culture as language and shared history. It's foundational to who a people are.*" Our food traditions tell us so much about our respective families. They are doors to understanding them, particularly those who prepare that food and

¹ "Sioux Chef on restoring indigenous foods, bridging cultures" by Jim Catalano, *Cornell Chronicle*, October 2, 2018 [sioux-chef-restoring-indigenous-foods-bridging-cultures](https://www.cornellchronicle.com/sioux-chef-restoring-indigenous-foods-bridging-cultures)



Sharon Aney has been a charter member of the AGS Wetaskiwin Branch since the year 2000, and editor of its newsletter *Roots & Branches* since 2010. Born and raised in Saskatchewan, she has lived in Wetaskiwin for 58 years where she and Russ raised their two daughters. They are proud grandparents of five young men, and delighted with two great granddaughters.

A firm believer that the stories of our ancestors should be written down and shared with family and community, she has written the stories she's found of her and Russ' ancestral lines, as well as many articles for *Roots & Branches* and *Relatively Speaking*.

Ukrainian Feasts

by Sharon Aney

When I asked my daughters, "What do you feel is a tradition in our family?," their immediate answers were "Christmas Eve Supper!" – closely followed by "Easter Breakfast."

My mother was not Ukrainian, so she learned how to prepare the meals from her mother-in-law, and we learned from her. My dad learned the religious symbolisms at his mother's knee, and we learned from him. Our descendants learn from me.

On the Eve of Christmas, Ukrainian Catholics have fasted as preparation to better celebrate the joyful coming of the Christ Child. Part of the preparation was to abstain from meat and dairy products on December 24th. Traditionally, the evening meal was made up of 12 meatless dishes, representing the 12 apostles.

The ingredients of the Christmas Eve feast were dictated by what was available in December to the peasant people, generations ago in the Old Country:

- Kutia – wheat that has been roasted, boiled and enhanced with ground poppy seeds, honey and maybe nuts, as the sweet opening course
- Borscht – a beet-based vegetable soup
- Perogies, with various fillings such as potato & onion, cheese, sauerkraut, salmon, dried fruit, etc.
- Baked fish and pickled herring
- Cabbage rolls
- Mushrooms in dill sauce
- Assorted sweet baking

The Ukrainian Easter breakfast table is also filled with foods that have a cultural religious symbolism. They bring to mind the agony of Jesus' death and His resurrection:

- pickled beets (His blood)
- horseradish & mustard (bitter herbs)
- ham or lamb (He is the Lamb of God)
- special breads (He is the staff of Life)
- coloured eggs (re-birth)
- cottage cheese (white - Jesus' purity).



The basket in this traditional Ukrainian Easter basket belonged to the author's mother.

I take portions of each to church for a special blessing ceremony the day before, and they are traditionally the first foods eaten on Easter morning. For us, the importance of these traditions is that we come together and we recognize that there are cultural, religious and a family history to the meals that we enjoy.

But it is not all serious – on Easter morning for the last 48 years, minus only a few years between generations, our house rumbled as our two daughters, and then in later years, our five grandsons raced up and down stairs indoors and outdoors, looking for notes and chocolate eggs that would lead them to the next note and finally to an insignificant “treasure”. The fun was the hunt – even if they were more than 20 years old! I have to admit that it was also fun for me to create new clues and hiding places every year.

We all know, and look forward to, what will happen on these occasions. Anticipation enables us to enjoy them even more.

Sharon's above article was originally published in Roots & Branches, Wetaskiwin Branch, January 2022.

RS

Alberta Genealogical Society

Relatively Speaking *Submissions Requested*

Deadline - April 1, 2025

May 2025 Theme **Music and Dance**



Is there a musical tradition in your background? Is music an important part of family gatherings? How about pow wow or dance from your cultural heritage? Has anyone in your family been part of a choir, drum group or band? Any stories about music lessons? Did you or anyone in your family make a career in music? How did new technologies such as radio or gramophone bring music to your forebears?

Send these or other family history stories
Max. 2500 words (Word Doc), 4-6 pictures (JPEG) to:

rseditor@abgenealogy.ca



Pam Cooke, an Upper Canadian who grew up in Toronto, has lived in Maskwacis, Alberta with her husband Brian Wildcat for 40 years.

They have three children and two grandchildren. Pam has been a member of the Wetaskiwin Branch of AGS for 10 years, recently serving as secretary.

Why did they let the turkey join the band?

by Pam Cooke

In 2021, when the Roots and Branches editor prompted members to write about "What do you feel is a tradition in your family?", Pam Cooke submitted this story highlighting her family's longstanding Thanksgiving meal. Reprinted with an update, permission of Wetaskiwin Branch AGS, from Roots & Branches Newsletter, January 2022, Vol. 20, #1.

Why did they let the turkey join the band?

"Because he had the drumsticks."

Verlyn, age 11, 2016

And so goes one of our Thanksgiving traditions, the Turkey joke, researched and delivered by the children.

I have been hosting Thanksgiving for our extended family and friends for 28 continuous years at our home in Maskwacis, except for the recent pandemic years. Our biggest attendance was 34, but lately we average in the mid 20s. Because we live in the country, our woods provide a beautiful backdrop of fall colours, and usually seasonable weather means we can enjoy the outdoors and have a big bonfire. Much tradition is woven into the preparation for Thanksgiving, which takes at least three days.

A day to shop for groceries and then squeeze a big turkey and ham into the fridge. A day for setting up. Over the years we have acquired Costco folding tables and chairs and spend a day moving furniture out so we can set up tables in the living and dining room. Decorating with tablecloths, flowers and mini pumpkins, and dusting off the family china and serving dishes that have been inherited over the years is a favourite activity. And finally, one day to cook.



Annual group photo of the Wildcats, Burrills et al, 2017 at the Wildcat home, Ermineskin Cree Nation.

One of my menu notes says: “*The night before, find a good TV show to watch while tearing apart two loaves of bread [for stuffing] as the ham is cooking. Cover with a tea towel. You will need an Xtra large bowl.*”



Annual group photo of the Wildcats, Amers et al, 2024, at the Wildcat home.

At some point we started taking a group photo, before dinner when everyone is hungry and easy to round up. Brian sets up the tripod, starts the timer and then runs into the photo while we shout “Maskwa-cheese,” which makes us all laugh. We have also added a photo with the oldest and youngest guest.



Cory, Renee and Matt, 2018, with Thanksgiving mascots.



A photo of one of Miguel's turkey vignette series, 2017.

Years ago, I bought a plush turkey and pumpkin from the Hallmark store on the main street of Wetaskiwin, which make their way into our photos and a few vignettes which I discover on the camera the next day.

After supper we bundle up and relax around a bonfire. Our friends, the Amers, often sleep over and stay for brunch the next day.

Memorable Thanksgivings

In 1994 Brian's brother Darrel had just been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and we had a pumpkin seed spitting contest to add some fun to a sombre year.

In 2015 newfound cousin Julia and her two sons joined our Thanksgiving. Due to ancestry research, I was meeting relatives from my father's side and was introduced to Julia, who lives in Edmonton. Julia and I share the same great-great grandfather, which seems like a distant relation, but becomes a close one when considering the other 7.9 billion people in the world.

In 2017, my 99-year-old mother had an emergency admission to hospital the week before our annual event. I flew to Toronto and began delegating the shopping and preparation of Thanksgiving to my husband and daughter. However, Mom was recovering by the weekend and after finding a cheap Aeroplan flight, I flew home in time to prepare our meal and then back to Toronto for Mom's discharge a few days later.

In 2020, having just attended son Matthew's wedding in Fort Erie, Ontario, our immediate family enjoyed a farewell Thanksgiving at Mom's house in Toronto, which had just been sold. It had been our family home for 58 years, owing to the longevity of my mother (1918-2020) and it was a bittersweet memory to have a final family meal there.

We ordered a delicious takeout meal from Bruno's and ate our meal on Mom's antique oak round pedestal table, using Aunt Norma's Occupied Japan china, purchased in the 1940s. Earlier in the day, we smudged in the backyard and scattered some of Mom's ashes in her garden over some of her favourite plants, including brown-eyed susans, peonies, rhubarb and the birch tree. (P.S. The antique table and cuttings from the plants found a new home at my friend's place in Newmarket).

The Food of Thanksgiving

A prayer: We are grateful for the fall harvest, the hands that have lovingly prepared this meal and the traditions of Thanksgiving.

Our late Kokum Theresa believed "You don't do it alone", whether it related to community or family meals, and this rings especially true with the preparation of our harvest meal. The turkey must be fresh. The ham comes from Sunterra. Clara cooks ten pounds of mashed potatoes. Carol brings freshly prepared cranberries. Linda brings a tower of tarts and never runs out of whipped cream. The three sisters, the corn, the beans and the squash remind us of the diverse heritage of our large family.

I am reminded about the changes in the preparation and the sources of the food over the years. In the early years my mother-in-law, Theresa, would cook the turkey, sewing in the stuffing with a needle and thread and wrap the pan with the cooked turkey in a flannel sheet to transport it over the three kilometres between our houses. We would watch for her car to arrive so someone could run out and carry in the turkey. She made a delicious stuffing with ground pork that we all anticipated every year. Around the age of 75, she delegated the cooking of the turkey to me.

At that time fresh turkeys were hard to find and I can remember driving down Malmo Road, circa 2000, to a turkey farm for several years. It was a little shocking, not to mention unappetizing, to see the barn raised white turkeys without black feathers. Nowadays we buy a Bellwood turkey (raised in Ontario) at Sunterra, and it is always moist and tasty. If I can find Mount Scion summer savory from Newfoundland it goes into the stuffing, but usually it is just fresh poultry herbs. At first, the ham was purchased at Queen City Meats but when it closed in the late 1990s we chose a Gammon ham from Valbella Meats in Canmore, also purchased at Sunterra. When Valbella experienced some controversy, we discovered a delicious ham from K&K Foodliner.

The Three Sisters

The three sisters – corn, beans and squash – which grow together and nurture each other remind us of the heritage and relationships of this extended family and the importance of sharing a meal together and staying connected.

We learned of the three sisters from sister-in-law Lori who grew up on the Six Nations of the Grand River near Brantford, Ontario. The vegetable trio was grown by the Iroquois (and other tribes) and the plants were meant to be grown together, eaten together and celebrated together. The three sisters have been a Thanksgiving staple for many years. Butternut squash became a favourite after sampling it at the former Edmonton restaurant Jack's Grill, and enquiring after the recipe. The squash, when roasted and puréed with butter, salt and pepper, is delicious. We now look out for other sister namesakes. Friend Linda comes from a family of "eight sisters" and the "Three Sisters" in Canmore always remind me of Thanksgiving. Clara always gets the mashed potato job, peeling and cooking 10-15 pounds of potatoes. One year she experimented and made "skinny potatoes" with chicken stock. The group consensus ensured future mashed potatoes were only made with milk. Carol brings a delicious homemade cranberry sauce.



Adam tastes the tower of tarts.

Dessert started off as a variety of pies but soon Linda offered to make an assortment of tarts, much easier to serve, and visually mouth-watering on three-tier serving trays. Dessert became known as the Tower of Tarts. And we never forget the whipped cream.



Theresa Wildcat, centre, with her children Clara, Brian, Carol and Daniel, 2010. She was the first person to become a teacher from Maskwacis (U of A, 1952), and the recently built Theresa C. Wildcat Early Learning Centre was named in her honour.

The Blessing

A prayer: *We give thanks to the Creator for this Thanksgiving feast and our circle of family and friends.*

Before dinner, the food is smudged with sweetgrass, and then everyone gathers in a circle for a smudging ceremony. We looked forward to the words and encouragement of our kokum, mother and matriarch Theresa Wildcat who always led the blessing. When she passed away in 2011, the responsibility fell to me.

Not being comfortable with spontaneous remarks, I prefer to write the blessing in advance. I make note of our group's milestones of the year, including births, marriages, graduations and decade birthdays, as well as those affected by loss or illness. The sentences in italics are excerpts from my blessings.



From left, Pam Cooke, Linda Amer, Rashad Amer and Brian Wildcat bundle up for the green & white Thanksgiving of 2016.

Everything gets saved in a Thanksgiving file, which includes blessings, menus, recipes, list of attendees and photos.

We always close with Kokum Theresa's Thanksgiving prayer.

THANKSGIVING PRAYER

written by Theresa C. Wildcat, 2003

We give thanks for the peace and goodness of our country – CANADA.

We give thanks for our leadership, the Chief and his Council, for their insight and vision in governance.

We give thanks for our children, our grandchildren and the future generation.

May the Creator grant us spiritual guidance and direction in our endeavours and destiny.

God Bless us all!

RS



Ging Wei Wong 黃景偉 laboured with his Edmonton market gardening family for 20 years, and their artifacts can be found at the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library, University of Alberta. He researches the history of Chinese immigration to Canada, and his family has been featured in several books about Edmonton's gardening history and Chinese market garden families. In 2021, sponsored by TD Park People, Wei presented a talk on Chinese market gardens and the food security.

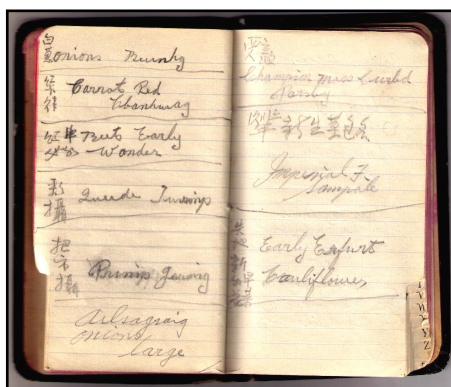
Sustenance and Subsistence

by Ging Wei Wong

My father was the first person in my family to come to Canada. On August 8, 1921 he stepped onto Canadian soil for the first time. He was only 13 years old. Wong Bark Ging 黃栢振 had his origins in China. His ancestral village is Chew Ging in Toisan County, Guangdong Province, China located about 200 km west of Hong Kong. Most of the early Chinese immigrants came to Canada from the Guangdong region. Taishan is known as the “first home of the overseas Chinese.”¹

My father likely started as unskilled labour in Vancouver, then made his way eastward as a cook arriving in Alberta in 1924. He most likely acquired his cooking skills working in restaurants, cafés or coal mining camps in British Columbia or Alberta.

Having been born into China's agrarian society he certainly would have gained some experience in growing vegetables before he sailed for North America. Making a circuitous route to Alberta as a cook, he may have been hired by Gum Lang who was engaged in farming, restaurant work and general merchandise in southern Alberta at a place called Retlaw, located near the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks.



Bark Ging's notebook of vegetable seed varieties.

Here, Bark Ging's affinity for market gardening may have been rekindled and he would have learned valuable skills for the Canadian climate. There was a date entry of Oct. 29, 1930 in one of his notebooks that recorded vegetable seed varieties.

Bark Ging's earliest market garden in Edmonton was located near the High Level Bridge. The following is from an article by renowned Edmonton historian Tony Cashman called *The Bridge That Refuses to Fall*: “...the Royal Glenora Club sits on the site of the former Chinese market garden ...”.²



After the harvest in 1930, he made a trip back to China to his ancestral village for an arranged marriage to Young See (my mother). Because of Canada's discriminatory Chinese Exclusion Act, he returned alone in the spring of 1931, in time for the start of the growing season.

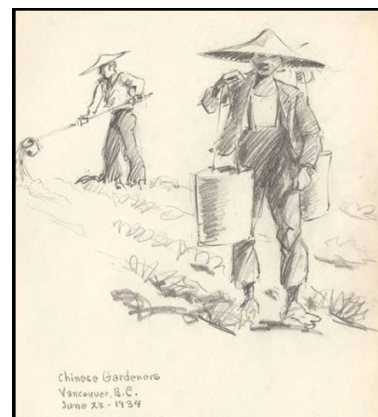
Bark Ging knew other Edmonton market gardeners like Gee Gut who farmed on the

This 1930 aerial photograph shows where Bark Ging's first market garden was located (outlined near the centre) where the Royal Glenora Club stands today.

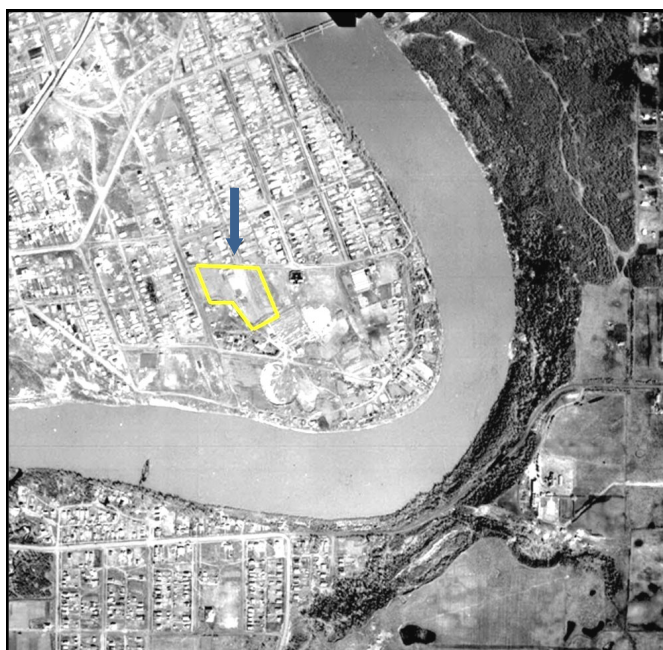
John Walter site near the 105 Street Bridge (1936-1950). Our family knew his son, Gee Cheung too, as he operated market gardens in close proximity to ours.

The address of Hop Woo (*Henderson Directories 1935 - 1940*) records the market gardening partnership my father had with Lung Kie Chew at 9013 – 101 Avenue in Riverdale. This “*Chinaman’s Garden*” provided sustenance for the local market.

Described by Greg Novik, a resident who grew up in Riverdale, he states, “*At recess I often marveled at the people tending that garden, carefully watering...the very large cultivated plot of beautiful black Riverdale soil supported multiple rows of a variety of vegetables. I would frequently see people weeding with hoes, setting what looked like cedar shingle pieces to protect young plants from the harsh sun. Along the perimeter of the plot there were stacks of wooden crates and boxes which were used to ship the fresh vegetables to either the city market, or perhaps restaurants in the downtown area of Edmonton. The gardeners were extremely hard workers and could be seen hunched over the cabbages and onions, all day long, giving the plants water, hilling the potatoes, staking the tomatoes, or picking the peas and beans. That sort of intense attention fascinated me because though we all had gardens in those days, the market garden got tremendous results. In the fall there were huge piles of potatoes, cabbages, and carrots harvested. It was a business and did very well I imagine thanks primarily to their incredible hard work.*”



A 1934 sketch of market gardeners and implements.



A 1948 Aerial view of the Hop Woo Ltd. market garden (outlined near the centre) located in Riverdale, Edmonton.



Bark Ging's market garden, outlined near the centre in a 1948 photograph, was located in what is now Government House Park. His house was at the rear of the Government House grounds before being moved onto a new foundation in Calder.

The partnership owned two horses used for pulling ploughs, discs, harrows and wagons while also packing riders around. Still sharing the address of Hop Woo in 1943, Bark Ging's Unemployment Insurance Identification Card stated his occupations as “Gardener and Cook.”

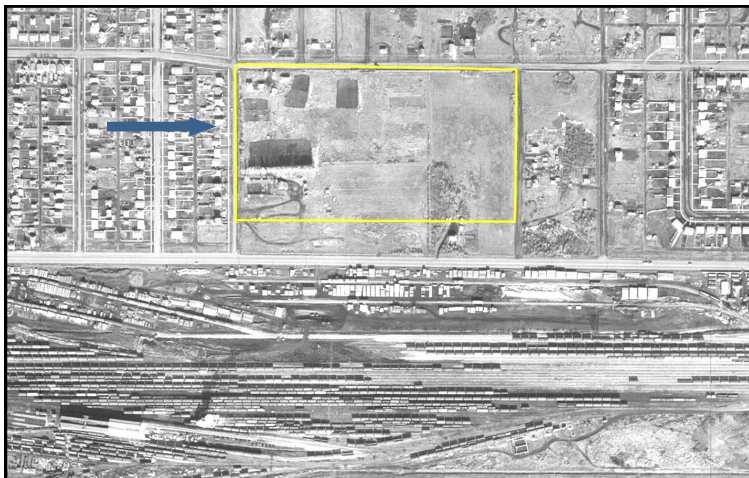
On August 18, 1947 Bark Ging's occupation was recorded as self-employed gardener (on his Canadian Citizenship Application) and the house he lived in was at the “Rear of old Government House grounds.” Bark Ging befriended Ernest Stowe, who was the high-ranking Chief Provincial Gardener of Alberta. This friendship endured until Stowe retired and moved to the west coast in 1952. Where the market garden was located is now a part of Government House Park.

Bark Ging must also have known Hong Lee who gardened near the Victoria Golf Course, as my father travelled between the Riverdale and Government House market gardens.

In 1949 my father's house at the rear of Government House was moved onto a new foundation in Calder and renovated to become their new home at 12782 – 113 Street.

Reunited 18 ½ years after their marriage in China, this is where Bark Ging and Young See finally started their family together in Edmonton. He was 41. She was 37. My first home was here, in the northwest corner of the property. I belong to the first generation of our family who was born in Canada.

Dad used to grow onions that could overwinter, go to seed, then died, so these onions survived year after year. When the property was turned into a park, people saw many wild onions growing there, hence the name Onion Park. It is now part of the Lauderdale Off-Leash Dog Park.



Bark Ging's Calder market garden, outlined above, became known as Onion Park. It is now part of Edmonton's Lauderdale dog park.



A Ford 9N tractor like this one was used by the author's father to cultivate fields at their Namao farm.

Between 1956 and 1959 we rented an additional 20-acre market garden east of the Cloverbar Bridge from a group of Chinese landowners who were unsuccessful as gardeners. They left a water pump, irrigation pipes and sprinklers which my dad used to his advantage. This area is now part of the recreational Sunridge Ski Area.

On October 15, 1959 a 10-acre parcel of land was purchased in what was then Waldemere, located north on Highway 28 (now 97 Street). This last market garden was referred to as our Namao farm. The Namao farm was prepared by burning off the brush and weeds before it was cultivated for our crops for the first time. My father used a Ford 9N tractor to cultivate the fields at our Namao farm (1959 – 1975).

Implements used in succession were a two-blade plow, a disc cultivator, and a harrow.

Growing up, spring was the busiest time of year to prepare for our market garden as we started to plant seeds after the risk of frost was over, typically after the May long weekend.

Wood-framed rectangular hotbeds were used to germinate and start thousands of cabbage seedlings. When they were about four inches tall with a viable root system, we would lightly water the hotbeds. Then we would pull a few of them at a time and place them gently in a wooden four-quart fruit basket. Once this was full, several more baskets would be filled. The seedlings would then be transplanted by hand into the fields.

For days we planted acres of green cabbage seedlings one by one in a checkerboard grid about 18 inches apart. Using a garden trowel, a hole was dug turning over the soil several times to loosen the medium. Then one seedling would be placed in the hole and tenderly packed in, using our hands.

With no source of water on the land, water was trucked in on the back of the pickup. Four repurposed 45-gallon oil drums were each retrofitted with a tap near the bottom. From here recycled five-gallon metal containers with twisted wire handles were filled. Using a sturdy pole, two containers full of water would be lifted onto a shoulder and carried

to the planting area. One of us would use an old Export tobacco tin on the end of a sturdy stick to deliver a dose of water to each plant. A sketch from 1934 shows similar implements that we used right up until 1975.

At the end of the day, there was one chore left to do. Each wilted seedling was gently lifted up, and a dusting of soil was spread over the base of the plant to slow the evaporation of the precious water. On the hottest days we felt the heat of the earth burning our skin through our jeans. Wide bamboo hats were favoured to provide protection from the sun. Overalls were the 'uniform' for market gardeners. We scrambled to get the job done and hoped that rain would give the seedlings a chance at survival.

Other crops included beets, broccoli, bunching onions, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, cucumber, dill, kohlrabi, lettuce, onions, parsley, peas, radishes, rhubarb, spinach, turnips and squash. Our crops of Chinese vegetables included bok choy, gai choy, gai lan, snow peas and suey choy.

After school and throughout the summers, we would eradicate weeds and thin out the rows – a tedious undertaking on our hands and knees using old rusty knives. Alternatively, we pushed two-wheeled hoes between the rows to cut off the roots of the weeds just below the surface. We could adjust the width of the two blades with a wrench to accommodate the space between rows. For narrower rows we used stirrup hoes.

Our other summer chore was repairing crates for shipping the vegetables. We recovered slats and boards from broken crates to fix another. We pulled crooked nails and pounded them straight to be used again.

Crops were ready for harvest in September and October. Typically, weekends were the longest working days, especially Sundays as we processed large orders for delivery to wholesalers on Mondays.

Taking an entire day processing pounds of cabbages in rain or shine was exhausting. Cabbages were cut, deposited in wooden bushel baskets until a sufficient number were full. The baskets were carried to a processing area where the cabbages were weighed with a farm scale and put into 50-pound sacks. Each sack was sewn up with baler twine using a large sailmaker's needle, making sure that a manila shipping tag bearing "B.G. Wong, Canada #1 Cabbage" was attached. At the end of the day, it was not uncommon to heft 40 bags onto the truck – a ton of cabbage.

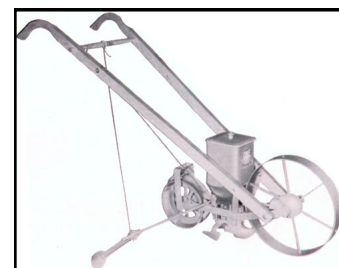
The success of the market garden depended on favourable weather conditions. We had a couple of lean years with subsistence level net incomes of \$587 in 1965 and \$935 in 1971. Even in the lean years, I have heard stories of my father giving away vegetables to neighbours and needy families. I have also witnessed him shipping crates of vegetables to friends in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory and Hay River, Northwest Territories.

From year to year, we saved and dried seeds from our best mature Chinese vegetables to ensure the integrity of the crops in the following years.

A Planet Jr. hand push seeder was used for crops that needed to be planted in rows – carrots, beets, dill, green onions, lettuce, spinach, parsley, bok choy, gai choy, gai lan and suey choy. Our crops were sold to MacDonald's Consolidated (supplier for Safeway stores), Scott National, Brown Fruit Co., Western Grocers, Woodward's Westmount and Downtown, Eaton's and Hudson's Bay.



A stirrup hoe



A Planet Jr. hand push seeder was used by the author's family for crops that were planted in rows.

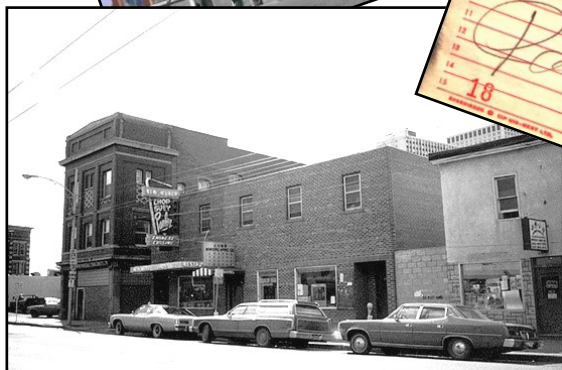


MacDonald's Consolidated, 10128-105 Avenue, Edmonton (1914-1965)

Bark Ging's last sales order for Kwong Hing Company, October 21, 1975.



MacDonalds Consolidated Wholesale was located at 10128-105 Avenue from 1914 to 1965. Then it was replaced by a new warehouse at 13940 Yellowhead Trail. Direct sales of Chinese produce were delivered to Kwong Hing (廣興) Company 10126-97 Street, established in 1940, and the popular New World Restaurant in Chinatown.



The Kwong Hing (廣興) Company and New World Restaurant in Edmonton's Chinatown

Our last sales order was dated October 21, 1975 for Chinese vegetables for the Kwong Hing Co. Ltd located in Chinatown: 65 pounds of bok choy at 35 cents per pound and 25 pounds of gai choy at 30 cents per pound. Our Namao farm was sold on November 1, 1975 when my parents retired.

The locations of four of the market gardens are now associated with recreation: Government House Park, the Royal Glenora Club, Sunridge Ski Area, Calder Onion Park/Lauderdale Off-Leash Park. Two locations have become residential areas in the Riverdale and Eaux Claire neighbourhoods. There were only a

few Chinese immigrants in Edmonton who chose market gardening as an occupation. It was hard work toiling in the sun, weeding the rows with bent back or crawling with knees on the baked soil. Hands and skin became cracked and deeply tanned in spite of straw hat and overall protection from the sun.

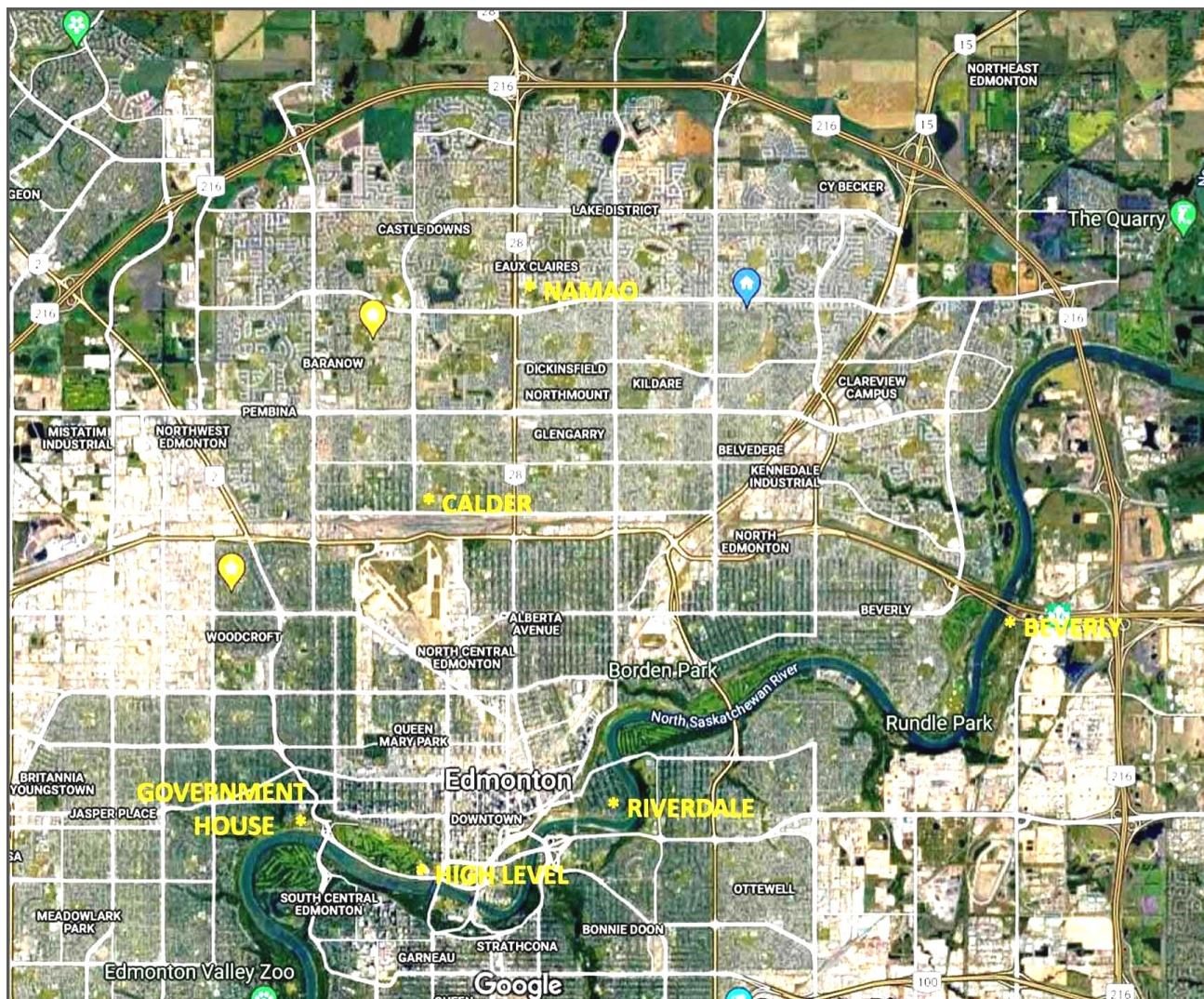
The Chinese treated their own not-so-nicely sometimes, giving unflattering nicknames to people with unusual occupations. Bark Ging Wong acquired the moniker "Nai Doy Gene." In Edmonton's majority Toisanese-speaking community at the time, there was no mistaking who "Dirt Boy Gene" was.

FROM RIVER FLATS TO "ONION PARK"

Awakening Edmonton winter slumber
 Chilling icicles thaw
 North Saskatchewan River floes
 Rays warming latent soil
 Seeds sowed, neat rows
 Tender sprouts of spring
 Challenging parched earth
 Unforgiving summer weather
 Threatening weeds hand-eradicated
 If there be autumn bounty
 Bok choy, gai choy, suey choy reaped
 Harvest to Chinatown merchants
 Where pennies a pound
 Chinese throngs buy for cheap
 Before Nai Doy Gene's market garden sleeps.

by Ging Wei Wong 黃景煒

This poem is a tribute to Wong Bark Ging who left Toishan, China for an unknown destiny in Canada, who chose to live and make his home in Edmonton. He adopted market gardening as his life-long occupation which supplied fresh locally grown vegetables to Edmonton's mainstream wholesalers and Chinatown merchants and restaurants where it was bought and consumed by grateful Chinese families.



Wong Bark Ging's market gardens sites

¹This article was first published in a 2013 Edmonton Chinatown Centennial Publication called *Edmonton Chinatown 100, 1911-2011, Past, Present and Future*.

² Tony Cashman, *High Level: the Bridge That Refuses to Fall*, *Edmonton Journal*. August 24, 2012

RS



Suzanne Maynard has been researching her family lines since grade school. She has delved deeply into her French Canadian roots, more or less going as far as she's been able. More recently she has researched her children's English ancestors, made easier with the internet and sites such as Find My Past and Ancestry.

Suzanne has been able to get back to records from the 1600s, though it has not prevented her from making trips to the UK to search through documents in various archives. She has learned that all is not online.

A Life to Embrace

by Suzanne Maynard

Her name was Annie Catherine Murphy, but her siblings called her Tueta. I think it was a child's twist of the word Sweetie. She was born on the 26th of January, 1868 to Thomas Murphy and Ann Sweeney and was baptized a week later at Notre Dame Cathedral in Montréal. Annie Catherine was my great aunt, and my Aunt Tueta was named for her. I knew that my mother wanted to call me Tueta, but thanks to her wonderful sister, that didn't happen. It was instead given as a second name, Irene, which was chosen from Aunt Tueta's full name, Tueta Irene Alexandra. There are no other Irenes in the family so it wasn't clear just why Irene was chosen. Alexandra was given to her, as it was the feminine version of her father's name. But why Irene?

I had been told that Annie Catherine had joined the order of nuns called Les Petites Soeurs des Pauvres; the Little Sisters of the Poor¹. Mom had a pair of the tiny silk slippers that Chinese women wore when they had their feet bound. She said that Annie Catherine had been a missionary sister in China and had sent these as a gift to my Grandma. She told me that Les Petites Soeurs des Pauvres were well known in Montreal for their charity. They would stand outside the racetrack and beg for money from the day's winners. This money was spent on meals for homeless seniors in the city. So, with that information in 1970 I wrote to the head office of the order in Montréal and asked if they might help me find out more about this great aunt. A lovely letter in return said that my request had been sent on to France, and perhaps there would be more information. There was nothing more.

I wondered if perhaps there was another convent in the United States. Annie Catherine was, after all, Irish. It was not likely that she spoke French, so perhaps she had entered a convent south of the border. And that was where things sat until a couple of years ago.

Then, I found a letter that had been sent from Ceylon to my grandmother in 1926. The first line was, "My Dear Sister Nora". Sister St. Irene had written it, and it was given to a Canadian visitor who mailed it to Grandma upon her return to Canada. So, there it was – Sister St. Irene P.S.D.P., living in Ceylon. And then there was the picture of a nun – no name – but, who else could it be?

Once again, in 2023, I wrote to the convent in Montréal and was surprised to receive a call a few weeks later from Sister Rosemarie in New York, USA. The convent in Montréal was no longer owned by the Little Sisters of the Poor, but the accountant for the new owners knew to send the letter on to New York. And, thank goodness they did!

Sister Rosemarie assured me that the information I had passed along concerning Annie Catherine Murphy had been passed to the Mother House of the Order in Saint-Pern, France. I did not hold out much hope, but within two weeks I had an email from France detailing the life of this woman who shared her name with me and my dearest aunt. And, here is her story.

Until the spring of 1891 Annie Catherine Murphy lived in Montréal. In the census for

that year, she is listed as age 23 years and is a dressmaker. She is living as a lodger. But the information from France acknowledged that in the summer of 1891 Annie Catherine joined the order of Les Petites Soeurs des Pauvres as a postulant, entering the order at their convent in Montréal. She spent six months here before moving to France to complete another six months as a postulant.

Her stay in France continued for another year and a half as she completed her novitiate. On the 8th of December 1893, she made her vows to the order and became known as Sister St. Irene. I had discovered through later census records that members of this family were indeed bilingual, so being informed that Annie Catherine had entered the convent in Montréal and then moved to France did not surprise me. She must have been an asset for this order of French nuns because, after serving for five years in Padua, Italy, she was assigned to Calcutta, India. Her command of English would have been very useful in this country, though she did also have to learn to speak Bengalee and Hindustani.



Sister St Irene (source Bourne & Shepherd) ²

The Little Sisters of the Poor had as their primary mission to care for impoverished elderly. In all of her early assignments, Sister St. Irene worked in the kitchen of the residence. Even in Calcutta, where she was assigned to assist the Mother Superior, she also worked at the gatehouse and in the garden.

The year 1908 found her once again in St.-Pern, France undertaking studies. At the end of this year she took her permanent vows, dedicating her life to the care of the poor. Annie Catherine was 40 years old. She had not taken her commitment lightly. On her return to India, she spent another three years in Calcutta before being transferred to Bangalore, India. Here she took on the responsibilities of Mother Superior.

So far in my readings I was amazed to travel with this great aunt, from Montréal to France, from there to Italy, then to India, back to France and to India once again. But Sister St. Irene had more travelling to do. Remember, I have the letter from Ceylon in 1926. In a time when most people didn't travel outside their home country, she had put many stamps on her passport.

Her tenancy in Bangalore lasted three years and then she transferred to Ceylon. Finally, I can put her in that place where she wrote the lovely letter to her sister Honora Mary (Murphy)

Murray, living in Edmonton. In Ceylon she gave up the responsibilities of Mother Superior, but continued as a counsellor and working in the gatehouse. Not long after composing that letter she was transferred one last time – to Rangoon, Burma. In what is today called Myanmar, Sister St. Irene continued to do office work and man the gatehouse.

But her life ended two years later, the 7th of November, 1929 when she suffered a serious heart attack. What an incredible life it had been. Instead of wondering where that odd middle name came from, I am emboldened by the story of a woman, an aunt, my namesake, who dedicated her life to caring for the poor, and through that travelled to so many exotic places. I proudly introduce you to my aunt, Annie Catherine Murphy – Sister St. Irene.

Obituary for Sister St. Irene

The following obituary is from the Little Sisters of the Poor convent in France.

She was pious, reserved, prudent, and had occupied the position of Bonne Mère locally in Bangalore. Illness did not keep her from fulfilling her work at the gatehouse or as a counsellor. She had again happily taken part in the evening recreation (a time set aside after dinner for community relaxation) when, in the early hours of next morning, the Good Lord suddenly called her to Him. Her extraordinary faith in divine mercy gives us hope that she has received the recompense promised to the missionaries.

Recommended Reading: *History of The Little Sisters of the Poor* by Rev. A. Leroy (1906), published by R. & T. Washbourne Ltd. 1, 2, & 4 Paternoster Row, London UK

¹The [Little Sisters of the Poor](#) are an international congregation founded in 1839 by Saint Jeanne Jugan, welcoming “the elderly poor, abandoned and destitute”.

²Bourne & Shepherd was an Indian photographic studio and one of the oldest photographic businesses in the world. Established in 1863, at its peak it was the most successful commercial firm in 19th-and early 20th-century India, with agencies all over India and outlets in London and Paris, as well as a mail order service. A fire in 1991 destroyed much of the studio's photographic archive and resulted in severe financial loss. The long-term impact of the fire, legal difficulties with the Indian government which owned the studio building, and the increasing dominance of digital technology finally forced the studio's closure in June 2016. (Wikipedia)

RS

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Mary Leah Milligan de Zwart is from Sturgeon County, the daughter of homesteaders. Mary learned almost everything she needed to know for life in the Bon Accord 4-H Garden Club. She obtained her BSc in Household Economics and was an extension home economist in Ontario for five years.

After marrying a Dutchman who loved the mountains, they moved to British Columbia. She earned her PhD in Curriculum and Pedagogy from UBC and taught in public and post-secondary education. Mary has two children whom she loves dearly, and has not forgotten her Alberta roots or the meaning of family.

Homegrown Hero: The short, intense life of Uncle Geoff (1922 –1942)

by Mary Leah Milligan de Zwart

Uncle Geoff, my father's younger brother, died in the Second World War. His mother, Edith Milligan, forbade any mention of Uncle Geoff after his death. Even today, 82 years later, the cousins cannot talk about Uncle Geoff without choking up.

Here are the facts.

In November of 1940, at age eighteen, Geoffrey Eaton Milligan enlisted in the Special Reserve of the Royal Canadian Air Force. In March of 1941 he began Elementary Pilot Training. He earned his Pilot's Wings in August 1941. His active service began in September of 1941. It ended September 10, 1942 over Holland, when the Short Stirling Bomber Geoff piloted was shot down by a German night fighter. They were on their way back to Downham Market in Norfolk, England after taking part in an incendiary bombing raid over Dusseldorf. There were no witnesses and no survivors. The crew of seven came from all over the Commonwealth.

Now for the story.

On January 10, 1922, Edith Hewitt Milligan and John Milligan of Bon Accord, Alberta, welcomed their last baby and third son of nine children – Geoffrey Eaton Milligan. At the time, Edith was 47 years old and John was fifty-one.

Geoff grew up with older sisters to mother him. His siblings ranged in age from seven to 19 years old, and John and Edith had already started going to California and then Victoria in the winter. One of a very few family stories described Geoff's fearlessness as a horseback rider, riding straight down a steep slope to the river.

In 1940 the Great Depression had been pushed aside by World War II. Geoff was eighteen and had completed his junior matriculation requirements and three senior matriculation classes in algebra, social studies and physics.

Geoff enlisted November 22, 1940 at Edmonton, Alberta. He wrote that he wanted to become a pilot. If he were unable to make a future in flying, he would go back to farming. His attestation papers included reference letters from the Bon Accord high school principal and the Bon Accord Postmaster. He wrote that he played baseball and hockey moderately, and his special interest was shooting. At five feet eight and 150 pounds, with black hair and brown eyes, he looked like his older brother Jack, my father.

The enlistment process was finalized February 24, 1941, when Geoff was pronounced "fit" at the Regina Medical Board. The RCAF Special Reserve Interview report noted these qualities: healthy and rugged, poorly dressed but clean and neat, deliberate, organized, confident, and pleasant. One assessment said he had a developing personality while another said he was immature. He had a 10-cigarette-a-day smoking habit and used alcohol occasionally. He was 19 years old.

In the next few months of 1941, Geoff learned to fly at Elementary Flying School, Sea Island, Eburne, BC. One of the instructor comments in his flying logbook was *"Tends to fly with his head out of the cockpit."* A pencilled note in the log indicated that his night vision was above average. All of Geoff's training flights and missions were listed in the logbook, as well as in his service records.

Geoff earned his pilot wings on August 20, 1941. Then he visited his family in Alberta for a week. He departed from Halifax, Nova Scotia on September 18, 1941 to join the Royal Air Force Squadron 218 (not the RCAF) as a pilot for the Bomber Command. It was a British squadron with a multinational crew, trained as part of the Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Geoff's crew had two New Zealanders as well as four Brits. He was the youngest crew member and the only Canadian.

Geoff flew active bomber missions for the RAF (Royal Air Force) for about the same number of days as he trained, just under a year, until September 10, 1942. He piloted in three massive bomber command raids – Lubeck, Cologne and Dusseldorf. The raids all involved bombings of civilian targets and were credited with turning around the outcome of the war.

The Short Stirling Bomber was an effective bomb transporter, carrying huge payloads. It had serious shortcomings. It was enormous and clumsy, and an easy target at low altitudes for night fighters.

A family memorial service was held for Uncle Geoff on September 25, 1942 at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Bon Accord. One year later, a memorial notice from "Audrey" was published in the *Edmonton Journal*. Who was Audrey? We don't know.

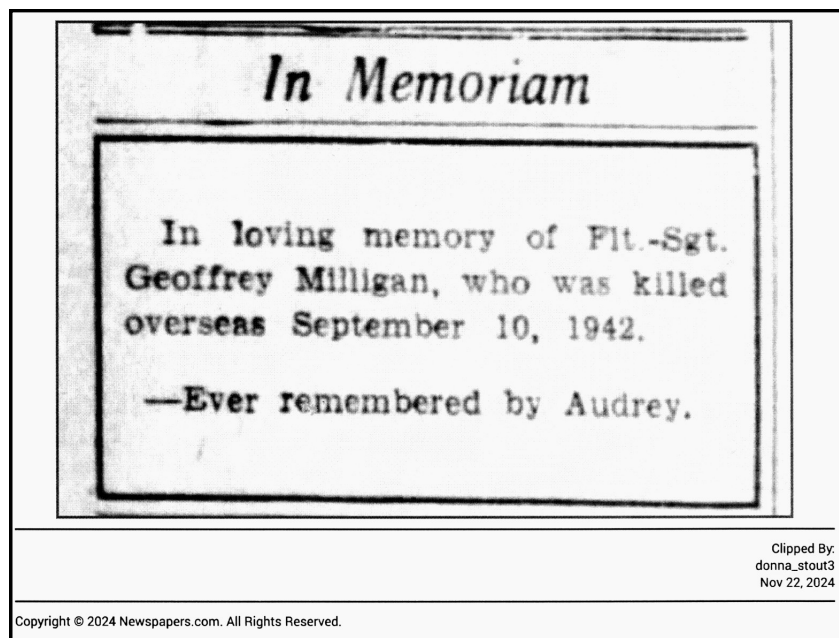
Uncle Geoff's record of service is noted in the Book of Remembrance at the Alberta Aviation Museum. A white granite gravestone marks his burial in Bergen-op-Zoom, the Netherlands.

The pilot's flying logbook arrived at the Bon Accord Post Office in 1948. It was delivered to Jack Milligan. Edith Hewitt Milligan had asked that a new baby be named after Uncle Geoff. The flying logbook filtered down to my brother, named Geoffrey Eaton Milligan, born shortly after the war.

Uncle Geoff's service medals and clasps were framed and always visible in a shadow box on the wall by his mother's bedroom. The medals vanished sometime in the past twenty or thirty years.

The postscript to this story involves a Dutch connection and a cousin by marriage. Kees de Zwart (my late husband) immigrated from Holland to Canada in the late 1960s. Over the years, Kees' cousin Lia and her husband Ruud Janssen have visited Canada many times. Ruud has become an enthusiastic Royal Canadian Legion member in Holland. He did not know about Uncle Geoff until October of this year and he asked friends to take a photo of





Uncle Geoff's marker at the Canadian War Cemetery in Bergen-op-Zoom.

I have not seen Uncle Geoff's marker in real life, only the photo. The word "Pilot" appears under Geoff's name. That is what he wanted to achieve, and he succeeded.

The care given to the graves of Canadian soldiers by the people of the Netherlands provides a compassionate ending. War is wrong. It will always be wrong. Nothing can ever compensate for any lives lost in war. Grief transcends the generations.

Written by Mary Leah Milligan de Zwart with help from Geoff, Joe, Rick and John Milligan. All references are available in

public sources. Many thanks to Ruud Janssen of the Netherlands and Donna Stout, Chilliwack, BC.

RS

Tracing Your Family Tree can be just a click away

Further your research skills with the TYFT educational program provided by Edmonton Branch of AGS. Let us assist you with workshops and online webinars. February through June.

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David Scott was born and raised in Montreal, PQ. He earned a BSc in Engineering at McGill in 1971 and an MSc at the University of Alberta in 1974. Dave worked for the Alberta Dept. of Agriculture for 32 years, retiring in 2006. Shortly after he joined AGS and began to research his Scott ancestors. He and his wife traveled to England with the 2010 London Trippers. David enjoys gardening during the summer months and skating in winter, and volunteers at the Greenfield Community Seniors Luncheon. He and his wife live in Edmonton.

Alfred Scott and Arthur Pettifor: Fellow RCAF Airmen

by David Scott

In the November issue of *Relatively Speaking*, I submitted two articles entitled “*Letters from an RCAF Airman during WWII*” and “*My Dad was in the BCATP*” which was appended to the first article and which included several group pictures of my Dad, Alfred Scott, and his fellow ground crewmen when he was stationed at the #7 Service Flying Training School in Fort Macleod in 1941. One of the group pictures which I submitted but was not included by the RS editors (no blame intended), is shown below.



Bob Franz also submitted an article entitled “*Sergeant Arthur Clifford Pettifor, C/95400*”. When I read Bob’s article, the statement at the bottom of page 135 about ration coupons placing Arthur at RCAF # 7 Service Flying Training School at Fort Macleod July 4, 1941 caught my attention. Dad was stationed there at the same time. I went through my Dad’s pictures and was very surprised to discover that in this photo, the person standing next to my Dad was Arthur Pettifor.

I wrote an email to the editor, attached the picture and asked her to forward it on to Bob. Needless to say, Bob was pleasantly surprised and appreciated receiving this picture. Dad and Arthur must have worked together and known each other quite well at that time.

You never know what might happen when sharing your family history. Does anyone else recognize any of the other people in this picture???

RS

To respond to David Scott, send an email to rseditor@abgenealogy.ca, and we’ll forward your email to him.

ABCs of Genealogy *Under the “C”*

by Denise Daubert

Censuses provide important clues ...

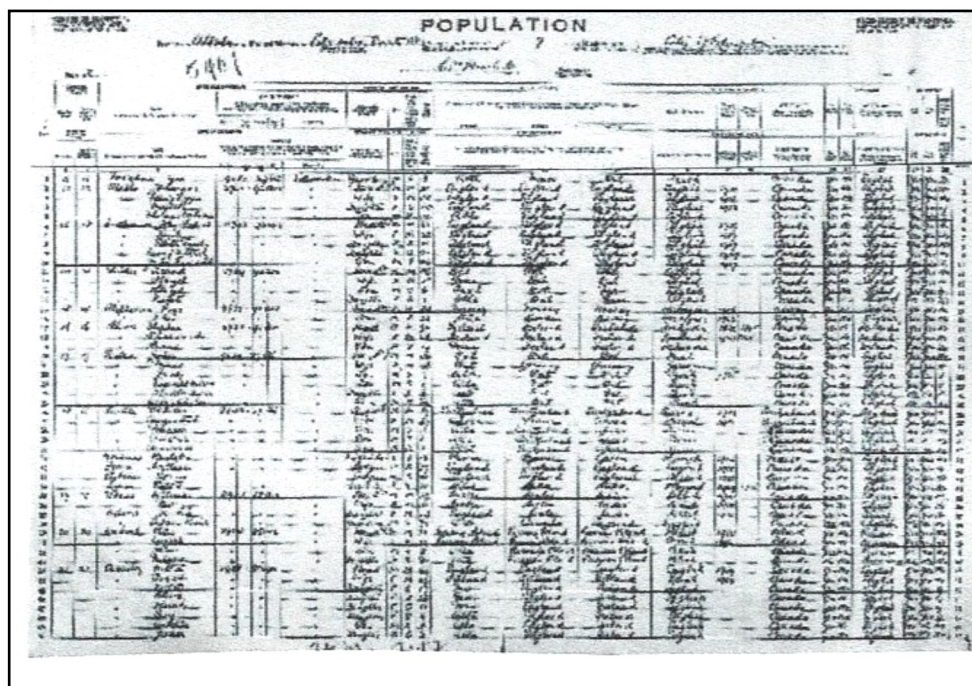
Cen-sus – noun. An official count of a population typically recording details of individuals.

(Source: Google’s English Dictionary)

Canadian census records can provide information and clues about information we are searching for, to uncover family information. Censuses of Canada which included The Province of Alberta were undertaken in various years. There were also Prairie Provinces Censuses which of course included The Province of Alberta.

At the Library and Archives Canada (LAC) website (library-archives.canada.ca) you can access/search Canada’s historical census records by year, name and province. This LAC website indicates that census returns are “official records” that count the country’s population. You will be prompted by provide “when”, “who”, and “where” before accessing the search engine.

- Pre-Confederation census records on the website: 1825, 1831, 1842, 1851 and 1861
- All provinces of Canada census records on the website: 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931
- Prairie Provinces census records on the website: 1870, 1906, 1916, 1926



The 1931 Census (7th Census of Canada) is the most recent census to be released. Various headings are on the census pages and they include: Name, Nationality, District Name, Language, Religion, and Description of Home and Occupation. Of high interest are the way families are listed with parents first, then children in birth order.

Left: An example of a Canada census page.

It is interesting to note that The Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA) have, on microfilm, a collection of censuses. Check with them directly to learn what they have.

RS



Ye Olde Genealogy Faire

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Red Deer Stake
and Alberta Genealogical Society Red Deer Branch

Genealogy Faire

Saturday April 26, 2025

9:00am - 4:00pm

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints church
3002 47 Ave., Red Deer

Free but please register.

For Information and Registration link

rdfamilyhistoryfair.blogspot.com

-  12 Sessions
-  1 on 1 "Getting Started" 15-minute sessions throughout the day
-  1 on 1 Lunchtime Speed Dating sessions for topics and locations
-  AGS AGM at 3:00pm
-  FamilySearch Center will be open all day

Sign-in and registration opens at 8:15am

Bring Your Own Lunch

Before registering please:

1. Review all the sessions listed on the website.
2. Pick one session for each breakout session or
Select the 1-1 "get started" session.
3. Review the Speed Dating location and topics at Lunchtime.
4. Go to website above.
5. Register.
6. Come and enjoy.

The following two articles – by a granddaughter and daughter respectively of Sheridan Lawrence – chronicle the life and generational memories of this pioneer of the north. They are taken from Peace River Remembers, Book 1, Vol 1 and published with permission of the Sir Alexander Mackenzie Historical Society.

The Lawrence Family

by Beverly Lawrence

“The Emperor of the Peace” they call Sheridan Lawrence, and there have been few in the ranks of Alberta pioneers whose accomplishments can outshine those of this gentleman of the north. Mr. Sheridan Lawrence was my grandfather. He walked into the north country behind an ox cart as a teenager and in a half century of hard work, created a family operation so vast it ran from fur trading to operating a power plant; and from running a school to setting up a tourist camp. The Lawrence story really began in 1879, in what was then the North-West Territories, at Fort Vermilion on the Peace River. Bishop Bompas decided to establish a farm and school. He arranged with the Rev’d. A.C. Garrioch to find someone in the east who would be suitable for the work of managing a farm and teaching. Mr. Garrioch contacted Sheridan’s uncle, E.J. Lawrence, and he and his family came west by Winnipeg. Mr. Garrioch followed the old trail into the Upper Peace River Country, and rafted the stock, some cattle and horses for himself and Uncle E.J., down the Peace in the fall, meeting E.J. at Fort Vermilion. Uncle E.J. built the school building, and Mr. Garrioch the mission building and church.

Six years later, Sheridan’s father, Henry Lawrence, with his wife and eight children, came west to work as a farm instructor at the Indian Mission School at Fort Vermilion. Just as they were about to leave, the Riel Rebellion broke out, and Henry proceeded by himself, his family following the year after. After riding in the relative comfort of a freight coach as far as Calgary, which in 1886 was the end of the steel, the family tackled the remainder of the journey overland. With them they brought a small portable steam engine reputed to be the first in the north. When the party reached Edmonton Settlement, they found about two dozen houses, the Hudson’s Bay Co. Fort, and three or four business establishments.

From Edmonton, the Lawrence party went by wagon train to Athabasca Landing. It was here the Sheridan Lawrence family camped alongside the Scott group. Archdeacon Scott, his wife and two children, one of whom was Julia Scott, who later became Mrs. Sheridan Lawrence, had travelled west from Winnipeg by the C.P.R., thence by wagon to Edmonton, and in jolting lumber wagons to the Landing. Perched on the bank of the Athabasca River, the Athabasca Settlement consisted of a tent-town, where workers built boats for their trips farther into the north. While waiting for the Hudson’s Bay Company employees to build them a suitable boat, the Lawrence and Scott parties witnessed a fast-moving forest fire that threatened to destroy the household belongings they had hauled from Calgary.

Because of the slow progress the Lawrence ox-team made, and because of the added weight of the steam engine, the Scotts moved on ahead of the Lawrences. They pushed on up the rapid-strewn Slave River, through Lesser Slave Lake, and into a shallow neck of water known as Buffalo Bay, where the land journey to the waters of the “Peace” began. A caravan of Red River carts, some 25 – 50 of them, creaked farther into the north-west toward Peace River, bringing Archdeacon Scott and his family still nearer the remote church on the riverbank. The Lawrence party travelled the same route; they were, though, one month later in getting to the Fort. At that time, Peace River was an obscure point in the little known Peace River country. When the pioneers gained their first glimpses of the centre, it consisted of one building, a combination store and trading post operated by the Hudson’s Bay Company. The families stayed only briefly at Peace River, then rafted down the river to their long awaited destination – Fort Vermilion.

Sheridan Lawrence saw his far north enterprises in full operation before he retired to Peace River town in 1940, where he spent the 15 years before his death. He died on February 1, 1952, almost sixty-six years after trekking north as a youth of sixteen. As a lasting memorial to him, the Canadian Government erected a cairn, which was unveiled by his widow, Julia Scott Lawrence, at Peace River on September 25, 1955.

I Remember

by Edith Lawrence Clark

I remember the wonderful days of childhood spent on “the Ranch” at Fort Vermilion. There was a beautiful, roomy house, cozy in the winter and cool in the summer, with its screened porches and summer kitchen. One large room at the back, near the cold dairy, was equipped with washers and rinse tubes, separator and churn, which was all run by an engine attached to a long drive shaft of pulleys. A huge basket called “the skip” stored the soiled clothes until wash day. There was a stove with barrels for ice from the river, which in the winter was melted in preparation for the weekly wash. This room made a cozy place for the children to leave their outdoor clothes.

The delight of riding horseback, then bicycles, skating, bonfires, picnics at the old mill creek and playing games shortened the long evenings. Remember “Run Sheep Run, “Angels in the Snow”, “Fox and Goose” and “Hide and Seek”? Also I remember the sheer delight of tobogganing down the long slopes, almost to the store, and taking turns pulling the toboggan back up the hill, aided by our Indian Pony “Wapoostim”.

Berry picking and camping at Prairie Point and Goose Neck Point was a summer occasion. We took the horses and wagons and travelled to the berry patch. There we camped out, sleeping under the wagon and tethering the horses to nearby trees. We did not get much sleep, as mosquitoes, bush noises and our own giggling took their toll.

I remember mother reading to us as we gathered on her bed in our nighties, and dad coming to the foot of the stairs, banging on the wall and calling “*Goodnight*”.

I remember the excitement of the crash and roar as the ice went out in the spring, followed in a few days by the joyful whistle of the first boat of the season. The D.A. Thomas, with all its lights, pulled into the landing at night, escorting passengers from all over the world including Lord and Lady Rhonda, Lady MacWorth, Lord and Lady Byng. I remember these people looking at the gardens and grain fields and exclaiming over mother’s horticultural prowess.

I remember, in the fall of the year, crawling into the loft of the cow barn with a head of sunflower seeds to watch the roundup of the cattle when they were moved from range to wintering quarters. There they were separated, cows from calves. I remember the bawling, the dust and the hungry cowboys.

I remember the flood of April, 1934. I can still see Malcolm and Mike Raychyba in a canoe, chasing a pig from the flooded straw back to safety. Then there was Joker [Lawrence] paddling around in the [flooded] pig trough.

Dad moved mother and the children to Peace River in 1937, so the younger ones could attend school. Dad got everyone settled, then returned to the Trading Post at Hay Lakes, now Assumption¹. Mother decided to join him for Christmas and flew to Fort Vermilion in an open cockpit plane, then went by team with Louis to Hay Lakes. I remember her saying, “*I never want to part from him again.*”

I remember the summer of 1940 and our family reunion. All the family attended St. James Cathedral and a picnic at Uncle Jim and Aunt Fanny’s beautiful farm which overlooked the Peace. The Peace River claimed Oswald that summer.²

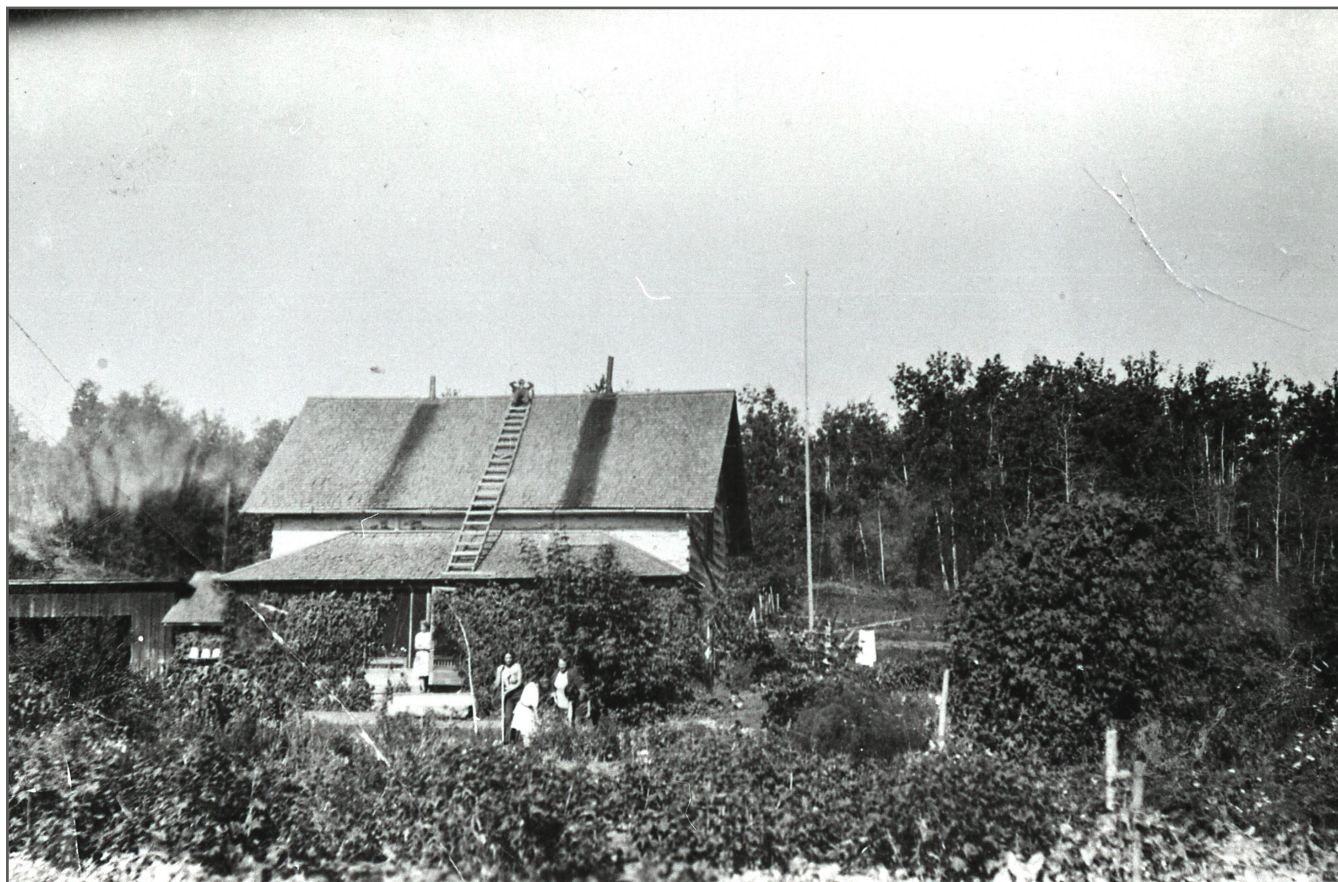
At Mother and Dad’s Golden Anniversary in 1950, we all gathered again. A church service was held at St. James with four of our family in the choir.³

Our next gathering at St. James was for the funeral of our beloved father [Sheridan Lawrence] in February, 1952.

People came from far and wide to attend the unveiling of a cairn in front of St. James Cathedral. This cairn was

dedicated to Sheridan Lawrence as an Historical Site, in appreciation to the early pioneers and his example as a leader and builder of businesses, churches and schools. About 50 of her family proudly watched as Mother unveiled the cairn.

Our “Little Mother”⁴ passed away on April 6, 1974, in her 95th year. When we all gather together, we remember how precious life is and how our lives were enriched.



*Sheridan Lawrence's house at the family farm in Fort Vermilion, circa 1930-1940, also known as "The Ranch".
Photo credit: Peace River Museum, Archives and Mackenzie Centre.*

¹Assumption is also known as Chatch.

² Oswald was one of Sheridan and Julia Lawrence's 15 children.

³ St. James Cathedral is located in Peace River, Alberta.

⁴ Julia Lawrence

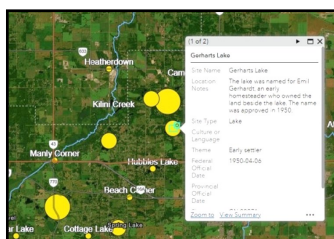
RS

Spinning Webs

by Denise Daubert



united.church.ca 2025 marks *A 100 Year Celebration of the United Church of Canada*. On this website you can learn about the theme of this anniversary, and review key moments in the history of the United Church of Canada on the Historical Timeline. If your ancestors were members of a United Church in Canada, this will be an interesting website to explore.

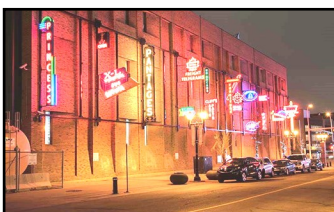


alberta.ca/alberta-geographical-names-program A “hot-off-the-press” announcement was made January 3 of this year from the Government of Alberta, about a brand new online tool for finding the history of place names in the province. I looked up “Ardrossan” as that is where I live, and it came up with historical information including that the name has Scottish roots and that the hamlet and surrounding area was named “Ardrossan” in 1909. The importance of the railroad to the area was also mentioned. This is a great tool to learn historical information about cities, towns and hamlets that your ancestors settled in.



https://plamondonmuseum.ca/ The Plamondon and District Museum (in Alberta’s Lac La Biche area) not only contains historic artifacts of Métis trapping, music, pioneer and church items, but genealogy materials such as Métis binders containing rare portraits and photos of the Métis from the late 1800s and early 1900s, as well as a genealogy computer with 8,000 Métis names and thousands of settler names and their descendants. The website features a Research Digital Library section (search

text online in many historic family/community books and articles) – many resources are downloadable. In addition, there are audio interviews recorded during the 1980s of local pioneers, and their descendants have been interviewed more recently via video/audio. Plamondon is known for its music, and many musicians/singers have been profiled along with some old-time music recordings. Open during July and August (check opening days on the website).



https://edmonton.ca>edmonton-archives>neon-sign-museum For those living in Edmonton or in the Edmonton vicinity, a neat night-time outing on a clear winter’s night is to view the Neon Sign Museum located at 104 Avenue and 104 Street in downtown Edmonton. Located on both the east wall of the TELUS Building and the south wall of The Mercer Warehouse Building, discover lit neon signs which tell the story of Edmonton’s businesses from days past and ... a few from more recently. The website has photos and explanations of each sign. It is interesting to take the time

to read about the restoration process of these neon signs on the website!



http://www.forposterityssake.ca The dedication write-up you will find on this website is this: *“This website is dedicated to those who served in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the ships they served and lived on”*. It is a personal website versus an RCN website, and the goal is that photographs/documents stored away by family members of RCN veterans (or by the veterans themselves) have a place to be displayed and shared. There is an interesting link to “flags and pennants” of the RCN to explore.

RS

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email: lethags@theboss.net
website: <http://lethbridgeags.theboss.net/>
Meets 3rd. Thursday of month 7:00 PM,
Provincial Administration Building,
909-3rd Avenue North,
Lethbridge, Alberta

8. Medicine Hat & District Branch

President: Deb Wickham
Box 971, Medicine Hat, AB
T1A 7G8
email: mhgs@shaw.ca
website: <http://mhdgs.ca/>
Meets 1st. Wednesday of month, 7:00 PM,
Medicine Hat Monumental Co. Ltd.
974-13th Street SW.
Medicine Hat, Alberta

9. Red Deer & District Branch

President: Jessie Dial
email: rdbags@gmail.com
website: <http://www.abgenealogy.ca/red-deer-district-branch>
Meets 3rd Thursday of month 7:00 PM,
LDS Church, 3002-47 Avenue
Red Deer, Alberta

10. Wetaskiwin Branch

President: Alice Hoyle
email: wetaskiwin@abgenealogy.ca
website: <http://www.abgenealogy.ca/wetaskiwin-branch>
Meets 3rd Tuesday, 7:00 PM,
LDS Church, 5410-36 Avenue
Wetaskiwin, Alberta

