

HERITAGE VIEWS

History and Heritage in Crowsnest Pass, Alberta



Issue 62



March 2021

IN THIS ISSUE

- Editorial and cover photo
- Heritage Partner News
- Did You Know...
- Articles: *Spite, Sex, and Scandal* and *Dead For Five Hours*
- Century Home Club
- Book Review: *The Bootlegger's Bride*
- Oral History: Liz Liska
- Heritage Hike: Il Bosc
- News, 109 years ago
- Sign of the Times
- Local Heritage Attractions

Canadian historical sources such as contemporary newspaper articles often trivialize the activities or contributions of women. There are reasons for this. Prior to the 1940s, men were almost always considered the economic and social heads of families, corporations, and society in general. This prominence gave men much more opportunity to participate in interesting or important activities, with some notable exceptions of course. The sidelining of women, and even more so of children, is a reflection of the times and not a choice made by modern historians. The historical record in Crowsnest Pass appears to be slightly more egalitarian than in many other Canadian towns, as I hope has been reflected in editions of this newsletter. If we reprint sexist material, it is meant to show the values of the past.

- Ian McKenzie, Editor

On the cover: Three women at the Crow's Nest train station on the Alberta/BC border, 1910. The camera-shy woman on the right appears in several of James B. Sutherland's photographs. The Kodak Brownie camera hanging on her hip might suggest that some of the photos in the Sutherland collection were taken by her – particularly those with James in them.

Photo: Crowsnest Museum and Archives, J. B. Sutherland Collection

Heritage Views is a publication of the Crowsnest Heritage Initiative. We are a cooperative committee of local heritage organizations and interested individuals who seek to promote the understanding and appreciation of heritage within the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass, Alberta. For more information on who we are and what we do, click here: <http://www.crowsnestheritage.ca/crowsnest-heritage-initiative/>

This issue was edited and produced by Ian McKenzie and proofread by Isabel Russell and Ken Allred. Inquiries, comments or submissions can be sent to heritageviews@shaw.ca. Future contributors should send in their articles in MS Word or something similar, with any photos sent as separate jpeg files. Do not embed photos into your document; we will just have to strip them out and reinsert them into our newsletter format.

Back issues of this free newsletter are available at www.crowsnestheritage.ca by clicking on the "heritage newsletter" link on the home page.

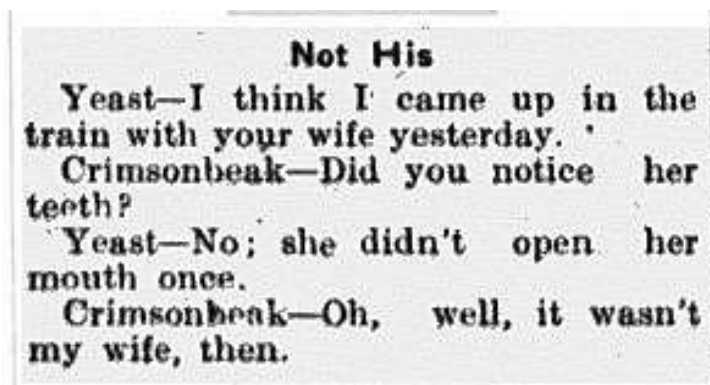
Heritage News

Details on fundraising for the rejuvenation of the historic **Roxy Theatre**, in Coleman National Historic Site, can be found on the website <https://www.crownsnestcando.ca/>.

The **Blairmore Bandstand**, also known as the Gazebo, turns 100 this summer. An article on its history can be found in our December 2012 issue #28. Also celebrating a construction centennial is the **Greenhill Hotel**, along with other West Canadian Collieries buildings in Blairmore.

With support from Alberta Foundation of the Arts and Edmonton Arts Council, author [Carissa Halton](#) is writing a **novel about 1930s Blairmore** and the women who influenced the Labour Council. Do you have tips or thoughts about this topic? Send her an email at carissa@carissahalton.com.

An interesting bit of **road-trip film footage from 1958** can be found [here](#), when the highway went down the Bellevue west access and through downtown Blairmore. It is surprising how little Blairmore has changed, outside of the cool old cars.



Coleman Miner, May 28, 1909

Members of our local heritage community have applied to Alberta Culture to correct the spelling of **Lyon Creek** (named after Henry Edward Lyon, Blairmore's interesting and controversial first mayor) by removing the 's' from the end of the name.

All of our **heritage facilities** were closed for parts of this winter, due to provincial COVID-19 control measures.

A new book *Compelled to Act: Histories of Women's Activism in Western Canada* includes an article by Dr. Laurel Halladay, 'In the Forefront of the Affair': *Women and the Crowsnest Pass Strike of 1932*.

Did you know...

... that Gladys (Ennis) Verquin, the last survivor of the Frank Slide, had her ashes scattered in the Slide after her death in 1993?

... that Marion Moodie, the first nurse trained in Alberta, worked at the Frank hospital?

... that Alberta's first female mayor was Clemence Jepson, elected in Bellevue in 1963? (The village of Delia elected a female Reeve in 1920, before villages had mayors.)

... that Isabelle Sellon taught school in Crowsnest Pass from 1921 to 1961?

Spite, Sex, and Scandal in 1930s Blairmore

By Carissa Halton

On the morning of May 27, 1935, Sam Kubilski went to the Royal Mounted Police Office in the Blairmore Courthouse to report a theft. He said that Blairmore's Chief of Police, Joe Fitzpatrick, and the landlady of a brothel, Leona Cudmore, had extorted two cheques from him for a sum of \$1150. At a time when men on relief made thirty cents an hour, and miners like Sam had a shift every week or two, this was a fortune.

Twenty-two-year-old Leona Cudmore was arrested that same day driving in a truck towards Coleman from BC. When RCMP Sergeant Cawsey requested the cheques be returned, Leona's sister, Mae, pulled the yet-to-be-cashed cheques from her stocking. After Leona was arrested, Sam Kubilski changed his mind about the charges. He begged his lawyers to withdraw, but the Magistrate refused.

Chief Fitzpatrick was arrested two days later. To defense lawyer Frank McKenna, this delay proved there was something bigger driving this case. Here are McKenna's final questions to Kubilski at Leona Cudmore's preliminary trial:

McKenna: Was there any suggestion made to you that any person wanted to get Fitzpatrick, that they were after Fitzpatrick before you laid the charge? Did anybody suggest to you...

Kubilski: ...What, to lay a charge on Fitzpatrick?

McKenna: Yes.

Kubilski: Lots of rumours have been going around. ...

McKenna: Before you laid this charge did you hear that there was any spite work mixed up in this case?

Kubilski: I heard it all. This town is fighting like dogs among themselves. Straightly I could say that, I could understand that.

McKenna: And you felt that there must have been some spite work to this thing?...

Kubilski: I was thinking there must be something wrong with this whole town.

McKenna: In connection with this case?

Kubilski: I am not sure about that.

THE COURT: Mr. McKenna is asking you a question about this case. You can only tell him about the case. We are not concerned with the town. ...

McKenna: Did you hear of any spite work in connection with this case?

Kubilski: Yes ... I went to Mr. Bill Knight. "Mayor," I said, "Could you fix this, take my money back peacefully from Leone?" and after I guess I told story. Don't blame me if I tell exactly. He said, "God damn," he says, "everybody..." no I can't tell exactly that.

Hogg (prosecution for the Crown): I think it is my duty in the interests of Mr. Knight to object to this evidence going in.

McKenna: You needn't object as far as Mr. Knight is concerned because Mr. Knight is perfectly satisfied in connection with this matter to bring out the spite work here in connection with this case.

Hogg: There is no spite work. The Crown is prosecuting this case.

McKenna: I am trying to find out what particular spite work prompted this charge. (To Kubilski) You think there was spite work?

Kubilski: Oh yes; I seen the people fighting, not agreed amongst themselves, not get along.

The transcript suggests that, while the victim didn't want to go to court, there were others who wanted Fitzpatrick to go to trial. Was it the RCMP, who had daily surveilled the union activities in the town for three years? The members of the elite in Blairmore, who wanted the communist council embarrassed? Or the Council itself, where there were factions between members and distaste for mayor Knight particularly?

The Woman

Twenty-two-year old Leona Cudmore had many names. She was known as Lena, arrested as Leona; registered on the census as Le Pera then Leprele, and in 1935 she used the alias Le Darke.

Thanks to the preliminary trial transcripts, we know that by the end of 1933 eighteen-year-old Mae and twenty-year-old Leona were residing at the Blairmore "sporting houses". From the reports in the preliminary trial transcripts, they worked nights often until seven in the morning; it was not unusual for breakfast to be eaten mid-afternoon. She would be arrested in September 1934 by RCMP officer Sergeant Cawsey for the following offense: "Unlawfully not having any visible means of maintaining herself and lives without employment and is therefore an idle and a disorderly person and a vagrant within the meaning of Sec. 238 s.s.sa of the Criminal Code of Canada."

We know that by Spring 1933, Leona and Mae lived in a house "set on the flats just below the brickhouse." We know they owned the property because in 1934 Leona borrowed \$500 from Sam Kubilski and used her title as collateral for the promissory note.



The Brick House brothel, about 1930
Crowsnest Museum and Archives

Council Connections to the Sex Trade

The Brick House district was within the jurisdiction of the Blairmore council and in 1934 they passed a motion that all women in the brothel would get weekly health checks by a doctor. It was the job of Police Chief Fitzpatrick to ensure the women had their health check.

The Council was liked by union members (the majority of the town's voters), but they were vehemently mocked by the *Blairmore Enterprise* editor. He often accused the Council of benefiting from the brothel, willingly sharing rumour and conjecture. Was there any truth to these rumours? The Council would certainly have received property tax from the Brick House. They showed an interest in the women's health. And the *Lethbridge Herald* accounts suggest that Mayor Bill Knight was seen at the brothel near the time of the extortion. And according to the court records, the Mayor posted bail for Leona Cudmore (along with a taxi driver and Dr. Stewart).

The Crime

At the preliminary trial, Sam Kubilski reported that he went to Leona's place to get back money he'd lent her. The separated 49-year-old man lived in a one-room house in River Bottom (by Hillcrest), yet over the past year he'd loaned Lena \$500 to "buy a farm" and then later \$285 to buy a car. He admitted he hoped to marry her. At four in the afternoon on May 25, he arrived by foot at Leona's house.

"Go ahead and tell us about you and Mae... Tell us just what happened and get it over with, it won't take you a minute."

"Like every time, you know, started to play this and that and been asking to kiss her privates... Well I started to do that, you know. She grabbed me by the head with her hand and same time Fitzpatrick, just like from blue sky, [was] right there."

Fitzpatrick was in uniform and threatened, "I'm going to have you arrested now and you get fifteen years in gaol for that."

Of course, at the time oral sex was forbidden under Canada's sodomy laws. Sam went on to describe to the court how he begged "to not make publicity" since he was in a sporting house. He offered beer, then fifty dollars. The police chief moved to the telephone and Sam raised the price to two hundred. Then Sam went to four hundred, and finally Fitzpatrick said he'll, "not let you out of my sight without a thousand dollars."

Sam said, "Have a heart, Joe. What's the matter with you. I am working man, been making my money very hard and why you pinching me like that." But Fitzpatrick wouldn't bend, despite that the two had worked for thirteen years together at the Bellevue mine. Sam offered to give him two cheques as he figured they wouldn't be able to be cashed on a weekend.

After that, Fitzpatrick and Leona went with him to his small "shack" which consisted of a kitchen and bedroom. He gathered his Post

Office Book and inside were government savings cheques for \$750 and \$400. He signed them and handed them to Fitzpatrick. Sam remembered, "He put into his pocket cheques... I asked him, 'You going to keep that publicity now quiet from spreading rumours', or something like that, 'going to keep quiet' or something. He told me, 'Not a mum in this world.' I don't know what that is mean 'mum', never heard before."

The trial would be anything but mum. In the June 21, 1935 arraignment of the suspended Chief of Police, the courtroom was, according to the *Lethbridge Herald*, "Jammed to the doors... many stood outside unable to squeeze into the courtroom." And the case was splashed on the pages of papers in Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Vancouver.

In his cross examination, the defense attorney focused on the fact that Sam did not report the theft until Monday when it appeared Leona and Mae had skipped town. Through the weekend, the women had tried multiple places to cash the cheques in Blairmore and Coleman but no one had enough cash. So they headed to BC in a truck with a butcher from Michel, BC.

On Sunday, Sam returned to the Brick House where he was told Mae and Leona had left. The defense lawyer asked, "And then you got mad, didn't you?"

"Well of course I thought they going to get married with my money." His lawyer J. E. Gillis encouraged him to report the theft to the RCMP. He charged Leona on Monday, then the delayed charge was laid against Fitzpatrick on the Wednesday.



Fitzpatrick and Knight, 1934
Crowsnest Museum and Archives,
CM-BL-17-04

Whose Spite-Work?

This brings us back to the question that Mckenna raised in the transcripts: What "spite-work" was at play? At Fitzpatrick's trial in December, he and Mae would insist that Sam gave Leona the money so she could pay for repairs at her house. They said that Sam and Leona were planning on moving together to the States. A fixed-up house could be rented to pay Sam back. Fitzpatrick insisted he was called on to witness the loan, though a receipt was never produced. Unfortunately, no transcript was made of the December trial of Fitzpatrick.

So let's imagine that the charges were exaggerated, or cooked. Who would do that?

Sam felt a lot of anger and jealousy. He believed he paid more than any other man at the sporting houses. Perhaps Sam's jealousy got to him and he decided to make Leona pay, though his attempts to withdraw charges suggest otherwise. But there is the outside possibility that Sam made up the story about the extortion because he thought that Leona had run off without him and he needed the charges to have the police help him get the money back.

By the time of the preliminary trial, Sam clearly wanted this case to go away. McKenna further alludes that "the police had wanted the girls for a long time." However, it seems likely that the police were more interested in Fitzpatrick than the women. The police, and especially Sergeant Cawsey, were no friend of the Worker's Council. There was likely bad blood between Cawsey, the Council, and Fitzpatrick who had replaced Cawsey's supervisor in Blairmore in 1933. Further, the council had tightened the scope of the RCMP's power in town as much as possible.

In the preliminary trial, McKenna grilled Cawsey about how the charges against Fitzpatrick were laid. Cawsey confirmed he had asked the jailed Leona, "Why are you taking the rap?" And he admitted, without detail, that he believed Fitzpatrick was the obvious brains behind the operation. However, it seems implausible that Kubilski would have been convinced to lie with so much detail to the court simply on behest of Cawsey. It does seem likely that Fitzpatrick would not have been arrested without the pressure from the RCMP.

Now what about the Magistrate's refusal to allow Kubilski to withdraw the charge? It seemed to me, initially, to suggest that the judge felt political pressure to have the case proceed so to embarrass the Council. However, one lawyer I interviewed suggested that the refusal to withdraw the charges was likely due to the Court's distaste for the Courts being used as a kind of debt recovery system.

Despite that the labour Council had won a resounding second term in 1935, the group was beginning to fracture. Knight had begun to direct the town to do him favours, for instance he had town labour fence his personal property. Knight was also seen at Leona's place around the time that Sam was there. This gives the impression that the Mayor was closer to the extortion than could be proved in court.

It's possible that the other Councilors wanted Knight and Fitzpatrick out. One RCMP report suggests that a Councilor wanted Fitzpatrick fired for drinking on the job. And in this exchange between Mr. McKenna and Sergeant Cawsey, the extortion charges against Fitzpatrick were laid with full support from Councilor and Chair of the Police Commission, Mr. Packer:

McKenna: And when Kubilski came to see you, you say you took it up with the town council?

Cawsey: My OC offered certain members of the council, in fact the council as a whole the full cooperation of this detachment if necessary, and when Kubilski came to me

that was a town matter and I carried out my instructions. ...

Mckenna: Before carrying out your instructions did you communicate with the town authorities, the police?

Cawsey: I communicated with whom I thought was the chairman of the Police Committee.

Mckenna: Who was that?

Cawsey: Mr. Packer

Conclusion

Whether Sam gave the cheques to Leona and Fitzpatrick under duress, or for the hope of future love, he only laid charges with the RCMP against Leona because he was terrified she was going to move without him. His jealousy about younger men seemed a constant reality in his relationship with Leona. Whether it is at the root of the charges, or simply was the reason Leona felt she could squeeze more money from him, Sam's hope for marriage to a woman in a sporting house was at the root of the case.

In December 1935, Fitzpatrick would be sentenced to two years less a day of hard labour at the Provincial Jail in Fort Saskatchewan. Bill Knight would not run again for Mayor.

There would be no record of Leona's defense, as she would die on a Friday night just weeks before her trial. A car she and Mae were passengers in crashed into a bridge on the Crowsnest River near Sentinel Station. The bridge rail pierced the

passenger side of the windshield, likely killing Leona instantly, then crashed through the rear window injuring Mae's date, Steve Brbrosky. The uninjured driver Charles Koska ran towards Crows' Nest Station for help, leaving Mae with her dead sister and the injured Brbrosky. An inquest determined that the bridge needed to be widened and equipped with a reflector, and charges of manslaughter against the driver were withdrawn. Leona was laid to rest in the Blairmore Union Cemetery.

The Century Home Club

Address: 15009 21 Avenue, Frank.

Year built: Possibly 1902, one of our oldest still in its original location.

Features: Side bay window, wrap-around porch, rear addition.

Significant occupants: August V. Lang, store owner, 1902 - 1908; Alfred Muller, coal company manager, 1908 - 1909; W. T. Young, Methodist minister, 1917 - 1921.

Other history: used by Calabash Club, 1911 - 1917, hosting many of Frank's fashionable young men.



Side view, 1929 Crowsnest Museum and Archives CM-FR-43-03

He Was Dead For Five Hours – A Mother’s Story

reprinted from *Health*, July/August 1953, published by the Health League of Canada

“Walter Vysohlid” would be a name on a tombstone in Frank, Alberta, if his mother had believed a doctor 25 years ago [from 1953, when this article was first published; 92 years ago now]. The doctor pronounced him dead from drowning at 10 months of age. Instead, Walter Vysohlid is a fireman on the Canadian Pacific Railway, a happily married man with two fine children. And he owes his life to an Italian ice cream peddler – a man who had no medical knowledge but who was possessed of a life-sustaining faith.

Here is how 10-months-old Walter was “drowned”, in the words of his mother, Mrs. J. A. Vysohlid, who still lives in Frank, Alta:-

“In the month of June in 1928 – it was a Saturday afternoon – I had my boys (both babies then – the older 21 months, the baby just 10 months) at home with me. There were a few napkins to be rinsed out as the next day was Sunday and I didn't want to have them around. So I filled a large boiler with cold water and stood it on the porch floor (the most foolish thing to do when little children are around); and meanwhile I went around the house to do something else. The babies were playing inside the house on the floor; I thought they were safe.

“The baby was crawling and starting to stand up wherever he got hold of something. I didn’t notice that they pushed

open the screen door and were playing on the porch. Being busy in the house I paid little attention to the boys, knowing they were safe (the boiler with the water in it didn’t come into my mind).

“About half an hour later the older boy came into the room tugging at my dress and saying ‘Mama, baby is in the water.’ At first I didn’t notice him much, and he kept on that the baby was in the water and pulling my dress to show me. Then, horrors! – I remembered the boiler filled with water! Like lightning I was in the porch, and the only thing I saw was the tip of his little shoes protruding from the water.

“I sure pulled him out quick; but, to my horror, the baby was gone – his face a blue color, his eyes open, mouth open, his body stiff. I ran out with the little body in my arms screaming and calling for help. Just in that moment a truck stopped in front of my house, the driver shouting ‘Ice cream for sale’. There I was screaming and the man shouting his wares – we were not helping the baby any, as I didn’t know how to give first aid for drowning.

“So I ran to the truck, pleading to the man to take me to a doctor and showing him my baby drowned. ‘Jesus Christ woman, do something with that baby. Hurry up. No use to go to a doctor. That would be too

late!’ – Never as long as I live will I forget those words. This good man quickly understood my situation. He jumped out of the truck, took the baby out of my arms and right outside his truck started to give him aid. With him was his 14-year-old son, and he too gave a hand when his father was tired. A doctor was called from a nearby town. Meanwhile people started to gather around. Father and son worked feverishly without stopping, and still with no success, on the drowned baby.

“The doctor came, examined the body and proclaimed it dead. He turned to the people who were standing around and said it was foolish to work and try to revive the baby when he was sure it was dead. He asked me how long I thought the baby was in the water and I told him about 25 minutes (I am sure he was in the water longer than that). The doctor said ‘eight to 10 minutes is enough for a person to be drowned.’ Many people who heard this gave up hope for the baby, but not all of them. This ice cream peddler and his son didn’t give up (his name is Tony Stella of Blairmore, Italian and the father of 12 children).

“They worked for hours, these two, and later my neighbor, Mr. Garison, helped too.

“As the tongue of the baby was curled up in his throat, one of the men got hold of it and had to pinch it until the blood came in order to hold it.

“This all happened around four o’clock, and about eight o’clock in the evening the baby started moaning, but gave no other signs of

life at all. His body was rigid, his eyes fixed. Then the blue color of his face began to disappear, and that was a good sign that there was still life in his body, so we took the baby into the house. The doctor came back again – without being called this time. It was around nine o’clock in the evening, the baby still moaning and his limbs still stiff like dead. Again the doctor said ‘No use. He’s as good as dead. He has had a great shock, poor fellow, and that was enough to kill him.’ Imagine these words from a doctor when there was already evidence that there was life in the little body! Further, when the doctor was still in the house, the baby’s bowels started to move – another sign of life – and he still was giving my baby up! (There are witnesses to this.)

“The people were furious who witnessed such ignorance. Some ran out after the doctor as he went to his car, calling him back to do something for that baby. ‘What do you want me to do?’ he said. ‘That baby is gone, finished, there is nothing that I can do.’ But the moaning, doctor, that shows the baby is alive! ‘That doesn’t matter. I’ve told you he is a goner!’

“At 11 o’clock the same evening, the baby moved his toes on one foot, then a while later on the other foot. Then his eyes started to move. A woman neighbor (Mrs. Wislett, residing now in Blairmore) and I were rubbing the baby’s body all over with mustard ointment. How we rejoiced when bit by bit the baby showed more life until instead of moaning he changed in sound to crying! Somebody brought a little whiskey,

so we gave the baby about two teaspoonsful and a while later he fell asleep.

“Next morning people came in to see how he was getting along, and to their surprise he was standing in his crib calling ‘Mama, mama’ and waiting for his bottle of milk. Of course he was hungry!

“If it hadn’t been for Mr. Stella coming along with his ice cream when this accident happened my baby would have been left unattended and died.

“I am only a humble housewife, but I think books should be written on this subject to save thousands and thousands of precious lives.”

In a letter dated April 26, 1952, Mrs. Vysohlid wrote again in answer to a query from the Health League of Canada, and in part her reply was:

“My son Walter did not suffer any permanent or serious effects from prolonged immersion. He grew up into a healthy and normal young man. At the age of 15 he started to work as a watchman for the Canadian Pacific Railway and today he is a locomotive fireman working himself up to an engineer.

“If we had listened to the attending doctor who pronounced him dead, Walter would have been dead. People who witnessed the incident thought it a miracle when the boy revived, but I know without working on him for so many hours this miracle would not have taken place.

“And yet we often hear on the radio or read in the newspaper about drownings where artificial respiration was applied for two hours without success and the victim given up for dead!”



Walter and his sister Geraldine outside their parents’ house, probably in the late 1940s. Photo found in the former Vysohlid house in Frank.

(Editor’s note: The original article He Was Dead For Five Hours is reprinted as originally published in Health, except “Vysholid” has been corrected to “Vysohlid”. The Health League of Canada is still in existence - www.healthleagueofcanada.com - but no longer offers a regular paper publication.

A Coal Miner's Wife: Q&A with Liz Liska (1920-2009)

Excerpts from a 2005 interview by the Alberta Labour History Institute www.albertalabourhistory.org

Tell us where you were born and grew up.

I was born in Taber, Alberta. When I was six years old we moved to Bellevue. I went to school there and lived there until I was 17. Then I got married to Steve Liska and moved to Coleman. Right now, we're married 67 years.

Was your father a miner?

He was a miner in Bellevue, and so was my brother.

You mentioned earlier that your dad was a miner in Taber?

Yes he was, at first. The mine closed down. There's nothing in Taber, so they moved to Bellevue. He got a job in the Bellevue mine, and that's where we lived until I got married and moved to Coleman . . .

When there was an accident in the mine, what would happen? Would they ring a bell?

He [husband Steve] was on morning shift. If you heard the whistle blow at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, you know somebody got killed. You don't know if it's your husband or your friend. A woman's life, you're living in fear all the time while he's underground. Then after, it's hard for the women here. One time there was an accident, and I went

out on the road to find out who it was. Two men were killed that day. He says, "Oh Steve's okay. It's my uncles that got killed." So I went back home. And they wonder why a woman gets grey hair.

Did you have friends whose husbands were killed in the mine?

Oh yes.

So what would happen to those women and their families?

Just keep on living. There was relief through the union. (Steve: "Relief might be \$8 a month.") And another thing, you could only get certain things. If a miner wanted a smoke, you couldn't buy through the union on that. You had to put down potatoes. It was hard times. The women now are lucky. They've got two jobs, and it's safe. They all work driving big trucks . . .

You were saying, Liz, about getting tokens [during the war].

Tokens, yes. If you wanted to get sugar, you had to give so many. If you wanted to get meat, you'd have to give so many tokens. One woman lost hers. I found them. I went in the store and said "I found this." This woman that was there, she grabbed it. She said, "Where the hell did you get that?" I

said, "Next time I find anything I'll take it home and burn it." That's all.

That was the gratitude that you got?

That's terrible.
Some people are like that.

Other than living in fear all the time, what was the life of a miner's wife like?

Nice. It was okay.
Oh heck. I had the three children.

They went to school. You didn't have to pay for books or anything. Even in the schools, they used to give them milk, little things of milk. Saturday or Sunday we always made sure we went fishing or we went out. Steve played the accordion. They'd phone him to come to weddings and parties. The people were very friendly. Nobody was trying to beat somebody else.

So there was a real sense of community?

Yes, it was really nice. (Steve: "People had more fun at that time than they do now.")
All they do now is work . . .

You talked about delivering milk when you were young . . .

We had five cows, and I'm telling you, we had to go from school [in Bellevue] to Passburg, now where they've got the graveyard, to get the cows. We'd have to



chase them home. One day, my teacher was very nice, she said "Liz, come here." She said "There's a storm coming up. Do you have to go and get the cows?" "Yes." "Well you'd better pick someone and go and get them now, because there's a big storm coming." So I got out of school to go. I sometimes came late to school, because we used to deliver milk to the company houses, all over. You won't believe me, but my mother had a bag and she put quarts and I used to take it on the bicycle. I was a real good bicycle driver. Not anymore. But that's the way my folks were. We had lots of milk and butter. My mother used to make cheese, so we were okay. I think everyone at that time had cows. The kids had to go for cows and the kids all had to do their chores at home. Not like now, they don't do their chores at home. "Oh I got this to do and that to do." They don't do as we had to. But that's life when you're growing up. We didn't have a washer or dryer at home. I used to scrub in one tub and my sister would scrub in the other, and then we'd reverse it the next week. And then my mother would rinse them out and hang them out. I was what when I started going out with you [Steve], 16? When we were getting married? I said, "Oh boy, I'll get away from the cows." So I said "Gee, they sure made use of us when we were home." But that's what it was like growing up in a coal mining town . . .

So besides the parade, what kinds of celebrations did you have for May Day?

All of the kids, parents and all, would go to the station, get on the train, and go to

[Michel-Natal]. They had a big celebration. Races and food and prizes. Then at a certain time, they had to all go down to the station. The train would bring you back to where you lived . . .

. . . Even at times in Bellevue, they had a club and they'd have dances for recreation. They'd hang chocolate bars up. If one of the guys danced with you, and you pulled one of the chocolate bars down, he had to pay for it. That was in the Ukrainian Hall in Bellevue. They had a club there. My folks always took us. And they had picnics in Bellevue. Here [Coleman] they didn't have as many, Steve said. But in Bellevue they had picnics, down where the graveyard is now, down below, that's where they had a big picnic place.

How long did that tradition carry on for?

Not long. When my children were going to school, there was no May Day anymore . . .

[The strike in Bellevue, in the 1930s]

A lot of guys were scabs. They would get guys from Coleman or Blairmore to come down and stay on the picket line to stop them. The scabs used to go in trucks, covered up, and the people were throwing rocks at them. I know, because I was there watching them. And the police were there on horses too. This one woman, she wanted to go shopping or something, and the horse was in the way. She kept telling him to move, and he wouldn't. So she hit the horse and it bucked . . . The guys who used to come help here, you'd have to take them to

our home, two or three, and give them supper. They stuck together.

[The Frank Slide depression relief work camp]

The boys from there, if they wanted to go to the dance from the relief camp, they used to sell their jackets and trousers to get money to go to the dance. So the government got smart. They put a big orange O on the back of the jackets and on the pants, so they couldn't sell it anymore. So the guy that ran the show, he let the guys in free. He says, "They're really mean to you guys." They were nice guys though, a lot of them . . .

Is there anything else you wanted to tell us?

Now we've raised our children. Now we should have it nice for the golden years, but they're not golden years. They're rotten years. They're terrible . . . Well we were young, and it didn't bother us. We went fishing. We'd go mushroom picking, always something. Right now we can't do anything. We sit in the house here.

. . . And I always said to him [Steve], a coalminer should never get married . . . The man goes to work, the woman suffers too. But still, you live. You don't know there's a better life coming. Well we did for awhile, until we got old.

* * * * *

(For the full content of this Alberta Labour History Institute oral history interview, see <http://albertalabourhistory.org/interview-transcripts/steve-and-liz-liska/>)

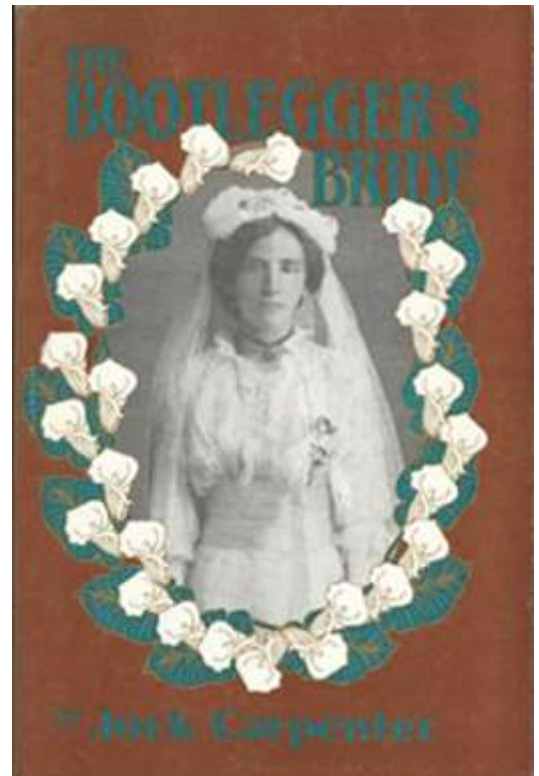
Book Review

The Bootlegger's Bride by Jock Carpenter (1993) Review by Ian McKenzie

The story of prohibition-era rumrunning, and the involvement of Emilio “Emperor Pic” Picariello and Florence Lossandro in the murder of Constable Stephen Lawson, is one of the best-known events of Crowsnest Pass history. As with all true stories, the personalities of the principal characters are of great interest, yet are often poorly understood. This is particularly true of Lossandro, a most tragic and compelling figure who has been portrayed in the past as a hard-hearted criminal, an innocent victim, and everything inbetween.

Carpenter takes the interesting approach of retelling the story as accurately as possible, yet presenting it almost as a novel. She conducted extensive research and uses all available facts, but invents conversations and background actions to portray characters as real people. Happily this results in compelling reading which retains an air of authenticity, although the mix of straight-up facts and fictionalized conversations sometimes presents an uneven writing style. The prose is occasionally clunky, but often quite good:

“...windows in the tiny houses were pushed open to capture the freshness although the houses, smelling of dust, mildew, the people smells of lives long lived, could never be freshened. The houses had long ago settled into their characters, like the people who lived in them. Old people, with faces lined like the plaster of their rooms ...”



Carpenter portrays Lossandro as a young women trapped in a marriage not of her choosing, and drawn in to a lifestyle which was stimulating yet beyond her capacity. The speculation required to build an image of Lossandro is largely based in fact, and fleshed-out in a highly-likely and believable direction. Despite the opportunities that fictionalized history provides to authors, Carpenter presents no pet theories or guesswork on who pulled the trigger, sticking to the facts and allowing readers to draw their own conclusions.

I'm not sure if *The Bootlegger's Bride* is still in print, but it can be borrowed from the Crowsnest Pass Municipal Library. I recommend it to readers who are uncomfortable with dry historical accounts, to hard-core historians willing to look at something a little different, and to anyone who wants to learn about this fascinating event. This is the full story, and the book speaks truth as much as any book on this subject can.

Il Bosc Trail

Il Bosc means “The Bush” in Italian and, like Coleman’s Bushtown, it was Bellevue’s unofficial suburb. It first shows up on a 1907 map as “Italian Quarters” squeezed between the railway and the Crowsnest River. This colourful community of squatter’s shacks had to move a bit when the river was rechanneled and the railway was realigned. Sometime after the big flood of 1942, tenants began to move out and the site was eventually covered over with coal slack, and that was the end of Il Bosc.

This is a level, pleasant, very easy hike or snowshoe of about 3km (round trip). Drive to the community of Riverbottom, turning onto 217 Street near the north Hillcrest bridge, and then follow 12 Avenue and turn left to park at the picnic shelter near the river. Walk past the gate onto conservation lands. The Bellevue Mine entrance is visible across the railway and highway to the north, and to the south you can see where the far bank of the Crowsnest River was reinforced with old mine cars. Follow the road over the open grasses of Il Bosc towards towering cottonwood trees, walking quietly past any fishermen you may see. When you break out of the trees into a meadow, look for old metal buckets and bedsprings which are all that remains of Il Bosc (or maybe it’s someone else’s old trash). Look for a road on your left which ramps up to the railway (if you reach a creek, you’ve gone too far). *Stay off the railway tracks*; walk east on the flat land adjacent to the rail line, which is

the old truck road to the Mohawk Tipple. The mighty tipple will suddenly appear as you round a corner.

This is the same tipple visible from Highway 3 just east of Bellevue, but the trackside view of its concrete skeleton is much more impressive. The original 1908 wood tipple was replaced by this one in 1928 which was active until 1952. The small concrete building on the left housed a coal-fired furnace and fan which blew hot air through a pipe into the tipple to dry the coal, preventing freeze-ups in winter. Neat huh?



Return the way you came.

Although this is an easy hike, you should bring water and snacks, should be prepared for changes in weather and, as always, should avoid encounters with huge hairy wildlife with big claws and teeth. Please be respectful of your natural and historic surroundings, and pick up any litter you might see (and leave none of your own).

Burmis News, 109 Years Ago

There have been many unique and curious happenings in the Pass, but none as strange as the discovery of the mythical Guzzuk, reported in the spring of 1912 in local newspapers.

Blairmore Enterprise, May 30, 1912:

“We have been in Newfoundland and seen hundreds of seals crawling over large clumps of ice; we have been to Duluth, Minn, where, it is said, the natives, like the squirrels, allow their toe nails to grow long so as to aid them in climbing the hills in search of wild strawberries; we have seen Oregon where many of the people are web-footed; we have seen rattle snakes chasing their tails around the rocks in Mexico; we have also seen tarantulas viewing the landscape from the top of tall banana trees and have seen swarms of centipedes crawling from under shocks of wheat in Southern California; and we have also seen a double headed baby and likewise a calf as well as a six legged colt and many other strange things, but it has never yet been our lot to see an animal called the “Guzzuk” which our Burmis friend claims to have

discovered in the foothills of the Rocky mountains. An animal with legs so arranged as to suit its convenience when ascending mountains in a circumferential manner beats anything we have seen, and if our Burmis friend will kindly inform us as to the style of pipe and quality of tobacco he was using at the time to produce these visionary effects that caused him to see such an animal, we might be induced to lay in a stock before taking our summer outing. Pass the salt.”

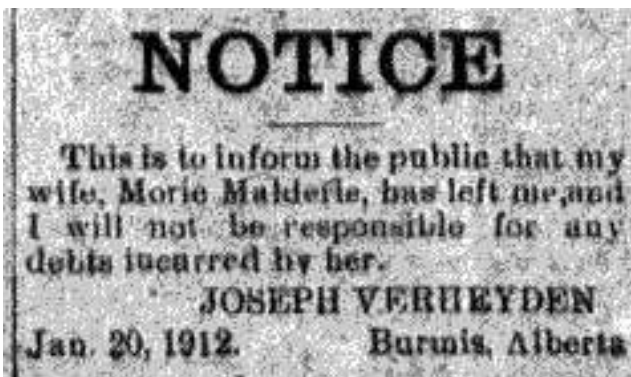
Bellevue Times, May 31, 1912:

“A Curious Quadruped Sighted Near Burmis

One of our esteemed citizens, while carousing around the foothills sighted a strange animal, which he calls a “Guzzuk”, and which he describes as follows:

The creature he describes as being a sort of a cross between a goat and a sheep, it having a large bushy tail, and the legs on one side are four inches shorter than what they are on the other, which enables it to travel fast around the side of the mountains. He says that, once it is got on to the flat it is an easy matter to catch it, as it cannot travel fast on account of its two short legs. He is organizing a hunting party to go after it, as he says that it would be a valuable asset to some of the zoological gardens, and for which a good price would be paid. We used to see things ourselves, but we are on the water wagon now.”

Mentions of the elusive Guzzuk continued to appear in local papers for a year, until the spring of 1913 when editors presumably tired of the joke.



Bellevue Times, January 26, 1912

Bellevue Times, March 1, 1912:

“More than \$2,000 of lots have been sold during the last few months and a great many new houses have been built. A large steel bridge is being built this summer over the Old Man river, affording easy access to the South Fork country. This should be a great stimulus to making Burmis their trading center.

Burmis enjoys the unique position of having a splendid Presbyterian church, just recently opened. It has no saloon or bar yet, though plans have been submitted for a large \$10,000 hotel.

At the Burmis police court before Magistrate Gresham, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Salvo and Cyril Ozyust were charged with being drunk and disorderly at Passburg on the 20th. There seems to have been considerable jollification with the result that Mrs. J. Salvo proceeded to wipe out the bunch with an axe handle. The pathetic part of the case was that T. Molitinka was thrown on the liberality of J. Salvo to get paid for his broken bedstead. Joseph Salvo appeared to be well acquainted with the police and was soaked \$10.00 and costs and Mrs. Salvo and Ozyust each \$5.00 and costs, all this plus advice from Magistrate Gresham.

Blairmore Enterprise, May 31 1912

Burmis is well situated. The townsite is large, well-elevated flat, like prairie, while at a distance can be seen the lofty snow capped mountains ranged around. All indications point to Burmis as likely to become one of the important villages of the Crows Nest Pass. We rejoice with its citizens in their optimistic outlook, believing that every industrious village is a real asset to The Pass.”

Sign of the Times

The Crowsnest Heritage Initiative has installed four information kiosks, about fifty signs, and over a hundred building plaques, each revealing a small piece of our diverse history.

Two signs in the Hillcrest Mine Disaster Memorial Park, installed by the Hillcrest Mine Disaster Memorial Committee, explain the role of women in the Disaster and the impact it had on them.



Have you read them?

Our Local Heritage Sites (inquire about open schedules and rates)



- **CROWSNEST MUSEUM and ARCHIVES** - 7701 18th Avenue, in Coleman National Historic Site. 403-563-5434, cnpmuseum@shaw.ca, www.crowsnestmuseum.ca. Glimpse the rich social, economic and natural heritage of Crowsnest Pass from 1900 - 1950 in two floors of themed rooms. Gift shop features local and regional books, and many other items. Tours and educational programs available.



- Close to the museum, the newly-restored **ALBERTA PROVINCIAL POLICE BARRACKS** includes exhibits and artifacts on prohibition, rumrunning, and the legendary shooting of Constable Lawson and the subsequent execution of 'Emperor Pic' and Florence Lossandro. 403-563-5434, cnpmuseum@shaw.ca, www.appbarracks.com.



- **BELLEVUE UNDERGROUND MINE** - off Main Street in Bellevue, 403-564-4700, www.bellevuemine.com. The only authentic historic underground coal mine tour in western Canada offers a family-oriented experience of what miners from a century ago saw and heard at work each day. Pre-booked tours also available.



- **FRANK SLIDE INTERPRETIVE CENTRE** - off Hwy 3. 403-562-7388, www.frankslide.ca. Knowledgeable staff share fascinating stories of the Frank Slide through dynamic interpretive programs and presentations. State-of-the-art interactive displays and exhibits focus on the infamous Frank Slide of April 1903, Canada's deadliest rockslide.



- **HILLCREST CEMETERY PROVINCIAL HISTORIC SITE** - Hillcrest. Visit the mass graves of the 189 victims of the Hillcrest Mine Disaster of 1914, and many other historic graves. Interpretive signs explain it all. The **Millennium Memorial Monument** is Canada's homage to miners killed across the country. The **park** features interpretive signs about life in Hillcrest and the effect of the disaster, and picnic tables. All free.



- **LEITCH COLLIERIES PROVINCIAL HISTORIC SITE** - Highway 3, east edge of town, www.leitchcollieries.ca. Stabilized ruins of a century-old coal processing facility explained through interpretive signs; on-site staff during the summer. Check out the nearby **Burmis Tree**, probably Canada's most-photographed tree; free.



- **COLEMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE** - downtown Coleman. Free map and pamphlet for a self-guided tour of this authentic coal-mining town amongst buildings from 1903 - 1986; most have interpretive building plaques. Glimpse the ruins of the mine plant and coke ovens, walk or drive through the "miners cottage" neighbourhood of West Coleman. An interpretive booklet can be purchased at the museum. Later, walk the pleasant **Miners Path**, retracing the steps of miners on their way to the McGillivray Mine. All free.



- **LILLE PROVINCIAL HISTORIC SITE** - A 6km long trail leads to this remote site. Ruins in or near this former mining village include the powerhouse, hotel foundation, and coke ovens. Interpretive signs on site. Enquire at the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre, 403-562-7388. Backcountry safety and etiquette apply. Free.

More information on these sites and other activities is at www.crowsnestheritage.ca