

HERITAGE VIEWS

History and Heritage in Crowsnest Pass, Alberta



Issue 63



June 2021

IN THIS ISSUE

- Editorial and cover photo
- Heritage Partner News
- Did You Know...
- Articles: *Roxy Theatre* and *Tale of a Nantyllyllon Coal Miner*
- Century Home Club
- Book Review: *The Devil's Breath*
- Oral History: Albert Goodwin
- Heritage Hike: Lyon Creek
- News, 100 years ago
- Sign of the Times
- Local Heritage Attractions

The Roxy Theatre in Coleman was designed and built in 1948, within months of the loss of the adjacent Palace Theatre. After the Roxy fire of 1950, the theatre was reconstructed almost immediately. The present-day undertaking to restore and reopen the Roxy is a much more time-consuming undertaking, due in part to the stringent fire and safety codes of today. However, fundraising has been very encouraging, as have other expressions of community support. Given the range of performing arts groups in the Pass, the revived Roxy will be a useful, attractive, and most welcomed source of entertainment for Pass residents and visitors alike, with the added benefit of being housed within a cool heritage building. The timing of planning and design work might be pretty good too, as we endure the ongoing restrictions of the battle against COVID-19.

- Ian McKenzie, Editor

On the cover: Coleman and Blairmore fire departments near the end of a three-hour battle to extinguish a fire at the Roxy Theatre, December 15, 1950. The empty lots next door once held the Palace Theatre and Coleman Opera House/Community Hall which had been lost to another fire in 1948.

Photo: Crowsnest Museum and Archives, 2007.004.0526

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.

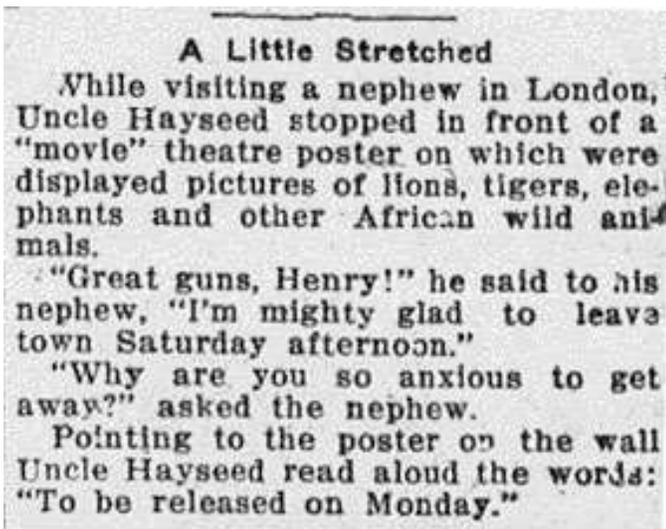
Back issues of this free newsletter are available at www.crowsnestheritage.ca by clicking on the "heritage newsletter" link on the home page.

Heritage News

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

Heritage Views regrets not announcing last year's 100th anniversary of the arrival of the **Dunlop Guns** in Frank. The cannon and two machine guns are amongst the many war trophies distributed to Canadian cities, towns, and villages after World War One.

There's been a significant reorganization of some local heritage facilities. The **Bellevue Underground Mine**, the **Crowsnest Museum** and the **APP Barracks** will be combining their administrative and operational functions into a more efficient, sustainable business model. The new umbrella organization will be called **Heritage Crowsnest** (not to be confused with the Crowsnest Heritage Initiative); more information will be made public in the coming months.



Coleman Bulletin, December 3, 1914

Our annual **Doors Open and Heritage Festival** will proceed over the August long weekend as usual, with a combination of live and recorded activities reflecting the uncertainty around COVID-19 restrictions this summer. The 2021 theme is "Crowsnest Music: Turtle Mountain Toe-Tapper" inspired by the 100th anniversary of the Blairmore Bandstand (see our issue #28 [December 2012](#)). For up-to-date info on events, see www.cnheritagefest.ca.

Did you know...

... that the first audio-visual theatre performances in Crowsnest Pass were "lantern slide" lectures?

... that Blairmore's *Wonderland* theatre opened in 1912 in the Lethbridge Brewing & Malting bldg (Royal LePage), but closed after three months?

... that various local musicians played in theatres during silent movies?

... that the Cole family once owned all of the movie theatres in the Pass - in Hillcrest, Bellevue, Blairmore and Coleman?

... that theatres were lost to fire in Hillcrest, Bellevue, and Coleman?

The Roxy Theatre

By Megan Lahoda

In 1948, fire destroyed Coleman's Palace Theatre. A new theatre was built, this time taking on the name The Roxy Theatre, then was immediately rebuilt after another serious fire in 1950. One explanation for the desire for prompt restoration and revival after the two fires could be that the owners saw an opportunity that would bring life, culture, and a better economy into this town – and the community saw the need for this as well. Not only this, but film theatres had become a standard feature of small-town life, providing a popular recreational and cultural outlet for citizens. The theatre in Coleman has been described as “the hub of social life for decades in Coleman,” and the community lacked a proper performance space without it.

As unique as it may sound, the name Roxy has a long history throughout North America. The theatre's name was derived from the original Roxy Theatre built in New York City in 1927 by Herbert Lubin and managed by Samuel Lionel “Roxy” Rothafel. This monumental movie theatre was the showcase for leading Broadway films throughout the 1950s and was also noted for its flamboyant stage shows. Although it closed in 1960, its legacy continued, and the name “Roxy” proliferated as a generic theatre name throughout the continent and around the world. In Alberta alone, there were eleven Roxy theatres. Of course, the Coleman theatre was among the eleven and

it developed a reputation of cultural importance in the town. Its name gave Coleman an edge in the cultural industry by providing a sense of high culture in the community, as the theatre represented a professional and well-known center for cinema and live productions.

The Roxy's architecture and interior design reflected the history of Canada and its people. The 1948 design is a Quonset-style hut attached to a two-storey building in front. The Quonset hut was designed during The Great War as a lightweight, easy-to-assemble structure that could be easily shipped anywhere to provide a variety of uses. After World War Two, as the military were decommissioning their operations and selling off their surplus, Quonset-style theatres became very popular and over one hundred and forty of these theatres were built across the world. Today, twenty of these theatres are still open including two in Canada, one in Puerto Rico, and seventeen in The United States (this number does not include Coleman's Roxy Theatre due to its closure in the early 2000s).

In the mid-to-late 20th century, Coleman's Roxy Theatre underwent four management changes and hosted entertainment ranging from motion pictures to live performances. Plays and other performances can both reflect the culture of the town and create a new one. The most recognizable way that



Early Coleman theatres:

Top: Coleman Opera House, 1908-1948

Middle: Grand Theatre, 1921-1932

Bottom: Palace Theatre, 1926?-1948

Photos: Crowsnest Museum and Archives

the theatre portrayed Coleman's culture was by representing their way of life and the history of the town. In the 1990s, owner Ralph Thurn was able to use his experience as a music producer in Calgary to write and direct plays that best related to Coleman. *The Shooting of Constable Lawson* was a re-enactment of the murder of Constable Lawson by Emilio Picariello. *TOK OMO Law* was a play that told the story of a young boy, eager to fulfill his dream of becoming a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer, like his grandfather who served during the days when notorious rumrunners ran rampant in the Rockies. Rumrunning was a large part of Coleman's history and is a shared part of the culture to this day. These plays were a way to educate tourists on the history of Coleman.

Just like many theatres across Canada, travelling talent was brought in to perform as well. *Seven Womyn for Seven Men* is a politically-correct version of the musical *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* which made one appearance in Coleman after selling out in Calgary. Another performance held in The Roxy that came from Calgary was The Stampede Chorus. Thurn also brought in a magician and hypnotist, Marc Savard, in 1998 who now performs in Las Vegas. Although Thurn valued local talent to represent the Crowsnest Pass, he also valued the importance of quality live entertainment from outside the Pass.

In *The Pass Herald*, reporter Francine Kilgannon shared her experience with the theatre and community atmosphere when she wrote, "It is wonderful to be able to



Roxy Theatre fire, 1950

Photo: Crowsnest Museum and Archives,
CM-GUSH-CO-09-14

boast of our own live theatre in Coleman and not have to travel afar to view others, where the performances may be grand but you sure can't say you know the actors by name.”

Tourism played an important role in keeping the theatre alive. The appeal factor came largely from the beauty and nature that Crowsnest Pass has to offer but also the special events taking place in the town. It is unclear as to which was more valuable to tourists, but The Roxy did take advantage of summer tourism and brought Coleman to the attention of outsiders. For example, in one summer show, *Minnie The Coal Miner's Daughter*, close to half of the attending audiences travelled from Calgary. Lastly, the geography and beauty of the Crowsnest Pass, as well as the historical value of Coleman, played a role in attracting professional filmmakers, such as the Disney franchise who filmed *The Journey of Natty Gann* there. Unfortunately, since 2003, the

Roxy Theatre has been closed and has not been occupied since.

Currently, the Crowsnest Pass is working hard alongside a cultural society, Crowsnest Cando, and community members to “Revive the Roxy.” They argue that the culture and economy are thriving, and the Crowsnest Pass once again needs a proper platform for many groups and performers to share and express culture in this community. When the Roxy can open once again to host live performances, the economy will benefit from the potential tourism growth.

It is important to discuss the 1950s-themed interior as it plays a role in culture as well. Interior design can play an important role in immersing an individual in an experience and invoking a feeling of nostalgia. The Roxy does this by taking individuals back to the “good ol’ days” and invoking happiness or excitement about reliving an old memory. It is important to create these enjoyable experiences and alternate worlds, especially in a small community, to allow people to step out of their lives and into the '50s once again.

The role that Coleman theatres played was not just solely for entertainment. Their role went deeper than that, by contributing to society economically, intellectually, culturally, emotionally, and educationally. Live theatres give a community something to talk about and identify with, which has and still will bring members of the Crowsnest Pass closer together and give life to Coleman.

Tale of a Nantylffyllon Coal Miner

By Ronald Jenkins Jnr

(Nant y ffyllon is a village one mile north of Maesteg, Glamorgan, Wales)

A story is told that when my grandfather Sydney Jenkins was a young boy, his father "Jenkins Snr" left the Llynfi Valley in Wales to go to Canada or "somewhere" to explore and find better work and life prospects as a coal miner. Later his wife Hannah and the two children were to travel over to Canada to settle and make a new and more prosperous family life together. However, the story goes that some time (months?) after his father had been in Canada, news or a message returned home to Caerau that "Jenkins Snr" had been killed in a mining accident.

With the tragic news from Canada, for Hannah Jayne Jenkins now widowed, there was to be a further family tragedy when Polly died as an infant child (the cause of Polly's death is unknown, but during the period, 40% of child mortality under age 5 were from: Measles, TB, Diphtheria, Polio, Whooping Cough or Pneumonia). The sadness and grief that engulfed the wider family at that time can only be imagined. Hannah Jayne Jenkins later remarried a man named Maurice Phillips, and in this marriage she had ten more children. With his mother remarried, Sydney was taken in and brought up with his maternal grandparents, Annie & William Snow, living in Tonna Road, just outside the village of Caerau.

My father, Ronald Jenkins Snr, recalls as a young man that the Canada story was

somewhat vague and uncertain, and was never talked of at home. He also recalls that for many years, his father Sydney kept a b/w sepia photograph of his father, hung on the wall at 18 Victoria Street, Caerau. Hence Sydney Jenkins retained a very fond memory of his late father. (The photo was last seen when the family moved from 18 Victoria St. to 142 Caerau Rd.)

Until recently the name of Sydney Jenkins' father had been lost to living memory! However, the 1929 Marriage Certificate (ancestry.co.uk) of Sydney Jenkins and Eleanor Mary Llewellyn, records "**John Edward Jenkins** (deceased)" as Sydney's father. A name more recently lost has been found again!

Having re-discovered the name of John Edward Jenkins from the 1929 Marriage Certificate, it was possible to find John and his parents on Census records. During the years 1881 and 1891 the family lived at No1 Bangor Terrace, Nantylffyllon. (No1 Bangor Terrace no longer exists, though several other houses along the row do. It is located in Nantylffyllon along the old south Coegnant road.) Head of the family is Evan Jenkins and his wife Mary. John the eldest of the children is 15 years old and occupation is a coal miner, he has four sisters and two brothers. It may be noted that some of the children's names re-occur in later generations. It would be reasonable to

guess that John Edward Jenkins may have commenced work at the age of 14 (possibly younger). In 1898 his father Evan Jenkins whilst working on the coal face at North Navigation Colliery lifting a heavy stone, suffered a “stroke” and died soon after.

By 1905, with at least 15 years of working experience, John would be a skilled collier in his prime at age 30, by accounts a strapping fit man. He was married to Hanah Jayne (Snow) Jenkins and father to Polly and Sydney.

In the book *A History of the Llynfi Valley* by Brindley Richards, published in 1982, there is a reference to Maesteg in 1907 when Agents were recruiting skilled Colliers in the Llynfi Valley to work in Canada. From the

information that we now know, we may venture an educated guess that, confident of his skill and prowess as an experienced collier, John made a courageous decision and emigrated to western Canada in 1905. Again we can only guess, but if John signed up to emigrate through Agents, then it is likely that his passage via ship and train journey, would have been paid by the Agency as an inducement for the skilled colliers they required, to take the journey

westwards. (It is known that, a steam packet ship regularly took a six-week round voyage from Bristol via Cork, to east-coast Canada and return. Train and boat all the way!) Documents and certificates, found as a result of a search, have now revealed that John emigrated to work in the Crowsnest Pass.



Nantyffyllon train station, date unknown. Photo: Facebook

Company and Union records reveal that John Jenkins was an employee of the French-financed West Canadian Collieries Company, working in the Lille No1 coal mine at and living in the company town of Lille. John was a member of the United Mine Workers of America, union.

John Edward Jenkins suffered a serious injury at work, which resulted in his death at age 30. The Death Certificate sadly records

a cause of death as “Broken Back.” The 1905 and 1906 annual reports of the WCC Company reveal further detail, that tragically, John was injured on 6th November 1905, crushed between a mine car and the roof. A cutting found from the *Edmonton Bulletin* newspaper dated 15th November provides some revealing description as to the accident and the condition of the victim. The newspaper reporter would be quoting comments from the mine and hospital. Having completed “boring” operations with his partner in the (stall) slope, it is the case that John Jenkins had hastily “hitched a ride” on the mine car haulage being hoisted up the No1 Mine slope, to fetch explosives. His head came into contact with a low timber beam roof support, this caused John to be knocked backward, thus “breaking his back.” The victim was “rendered helpless for remainder

of his life”, “a fine specimen of physical manhood” with no hopes for recovery. From the description of injury, the spinal cord severed would render a victim a paraplegic. In such circumstance, complications arise with respiratory problems, possibly pneumonia and other infections, perhaps (mercifully) caused the patient to expire on 16th January 1906 after some nine weeks confinement.

With my own mining experience and that of my father, Ron Snr., the newspaper cutting is revealing in how the accident occurred. It must be remembered that in those days the slope would be in total darkness, the miners did not wear modern “cap lamps”, rather John carried a “single flame” safety lamp, hence in the darkness he would not see the low timber.

Dr. Thomas O’Hagen, who signed the Death Certificate, was the Physician attending to the injured man. It is not certain that the hospital in Lille had been built by 1906, hence it is a possibility that John Jenkins was brought from the mine (via the railway as it was winter!) and cared for in the Frank hospital. Furthermore, the Death Certificate states the nearest post office as Frank. The Lille post office was not opened until February 1906! Taking these facts into consideration, it is another educated guess that John Jenkins would be laid to rest in the Blairmore Old Union Cemetery, perhaps not Lille. (There are no old cemetery registers, and his grave is unmarked.)

John would most certainly have endured weeks of pain and the worry for his wife and

This form is placed in an open envelope marked "DEATH CERTIFICATE" and returned to the Registrar of the Department of Health, and you should see to it that it is accompanied with regulations of the Post Office Department respecting mailing and the mail matter.

CANADA
PROVINCE OF ALBERTA *XIII* | Record No. *267* of 190

REGISTRATION OF DEATH
Registration Division of *Macleod*

Name of Deceased in Full	<i>John Jenkins</i>
Date of Death	<i>15th Nov 1905</i>
Place of Death (Street P.O.)	<i>Frank, Alta</i>
Sex (Male or Female)	<i>Male</i>
Age	<i>37 years</i>
Married or Single	<i>Married</i>
Profession or Occupation	<i>Coal Miner</i>
Place of Birth	<i>Wales, England</i>
Cause of Death	<i>broken back</i>
Name of Physician (If any) attending Total Illness	<i>Thos. O'Hagen</i>
Religion	<i>—</i>
Physician or Other person, and Post Office Address of Informant	<i>Physician Blairmore Alta</i>

I certify the foregoing to be true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief
Given under my hand at *Lille Alta* this *26* day of *Jan* 1906
Thos. O'Hagen
Physician

I hereby certify that the above return was made to me at *Macleod*
Alta on the *3rd* day of *February* 1906
A. J. [Signature]
Registrar



Hannah, widow of John Edward Jenkins, with her second husband Maurice Phillips, around 1940.
Photo: Claire Hart

The author, Ronald Jenkins Jnr., is the great-grandson of John Edward Jenkins (1876 - 1906), and is a fifth-generation coal miner who worked as an apprentice mine electrician at age 15. Born in Wales, he currently resides in Staffordshire, England.

two children back home in South Wales must have been traumatic. I have no doubt, that the people of the community in those days, nurses, work mates, Union officials and indeed Mine Company, would have done everything possible to ease the suffering of the stricken patient. Under the circumstances, perhaps the mining company paid for the hospital care and funeral. The Union might have written and sent personal belongings back to his wife... we can only guess.

In the discovery and writing of these pages, I have not felt the physical pain of John Jenkins but I most certainly have imagined the anguish, despair and hopeless sadness of the man, worried for his family back in South Wales, perhaps he lost the will live. In year 2000 I visited the Frank Slide visitor centre, and although I had thoughts of my great-grandfather, I would not realise I was only a few miles from his place of rest.

The Century Home Club

Address: 2038 119 St, Blairmore.

Year built: Unknown; about 1915?

Features: Narrow dormers on a steep roof, enclosed front porch.

Significant occupants: Unknown.

History: House was moved from Hillcrest in 1945. The housewife traveled in the house to mind her possessions, but had to stay there overnight when the end of the war was announced and the movers stopped at the Frank Hotel bar.



Crossing Lyon Creek. Crowsnest Museum and Archives 0213 Gush neg

Coal Mine Ventilation: Q&A with Albert Goodwin (1908-1996)

Excerpts from a 1980 interview by Tom Kirkham, held by Glenbow Archives at the University of Calgary

[Albert Goodwin worked in the Bellevue Mine between 1924 and 1962.]

...Tell us the difference between pillars and rooms.

Well the room is when it is originally driven out. To start off, when you go into your seam, after you've gone through the rock, naturally, and you're into your seam, you drive what we call an entry, right above the entry is the counter-entry. The air goes in on the entry and returns on the counter-entry...

They're driven in on the strike of the seam which is at right angles to the pitch. If possible they're driven at one half of one percent grade. By having this grade your load coming out is the same on the locomotive with full cars as it is going in with empty cars. Also the water will flow out, so there's your advantage. And from – above the counter, like, this is how to control your air, in one and out the other, and up the rooms which are, normally in this mine they are around 60 to 80 feet apart.

And there's a wall between them?

Square blocks. You can't go into a mine, especially a pitching seam, and drive up, because you get gas in them, you've got to have a circulation of air, and there's

crosscuts put through to cut it off, and then as you extend you block them off just with a stopping.

With timber?

No, it would be board stopping. Oh it's quite an intricate setup in the mine. You see, by law you have to have a minimum of two hundred cubic feet of air per minute per man, animal or anything in the mine. A minimum. And as much more as the district inspector may require. So if you have a lot of gas you need a lot more air...

The rooms were sixty feet apart, the rooms themselves would be normally fourteen feet wide, no wider than fourteen, and the height whatever the seam was... then you'd go out another sixty and you cross sixty, so that left you a block of sixty by sixty. Different mines had different sizes, Vicary for instance usually went a hundred feet because there was no gas.

And this also provided support for the ceiling?

Oh definitely, sure, sure. Well you put supports in where it was necessary, props if the roof was good, you had to put props to hang your brattice on to make your circulation and so on. If it was a poor roof you had to put sets.

They'd be timbers.

Yes. A timber is anything over nine inches at the small end, smaller than that is a prop...

We had a little impurity in the coal which we called the mining streak. Well now you get down in that once your place was started and it would just boil out the coal. Well that was the gas that's occluded in the pores of the coal and also a little pressure from the roof.

Was this gas dangerous?

Absolutely, it's the same gas you have in your house, CH₄, exactly the same gas for heating... It's dangerous to a certain extent, this is why the Bellevue mine was so good, it was so well ventilated.



Goodwin in 1938.

Crowsnest Museum
and Archives,
CM-BE-21-80

Now I used to have to go through my fan drifts, when I got up to being pit boss... now I use to have to go through these airways and take readings at minimum of once a week if nothing happened. Now my far fan up at Gold Creek there pulled 110,000 cubic feet a minute, day night and all the time. And then we had one here that pulled a different seam, and then there was a (rock?) tunnel back to another seam, two on one seam, and that pulled 70,000, 72 normally. Now that particular fan one day... the fan had come loose on the shaft, we had to take it out and have it repaired. Now you have to have permission from Edmonton before you can even stop a fan... It had to be taken out that day and put back that day. And when

we stopped that fan it was the first time that fan had stopped rotating for 25 consecutive years.

How as it powered?

Electric... There's a belt like 'that' from - moves around to the fan, inside there was another motor standing and the belt right there if anything went wrong (inaudible). Years ago they had a man at those fans, used to have to supply a little house to sit in, and they watched that thing all the time, the latter years well we had one man looked after two fans and they used to ride this horse up and they'd stay up there all day and then he'd ride back and check (inaudible)...

How much more pressure would there be inside?

There's not more inside, it's a minus pressure, yes because these fans all are exhausting fans...

... and it was drawn though and taken out. That's why you always got a heavier reading in the winter, because you had the natural rise of the air. There's one drawback to that system, it was very cold and icy at the entrance. It has many advantages. Working on a pitching seam this gas, CH₄, marsh gas whatever you want to call it, has a specific gravity of .559 therefore it'll rise. Now if you're pulling air out of the mine with a minus pressure, and that gas, you're trying to pull it from the gobs - not saying your pulling it, saying you're trying to pull it - if

that air happened to go off, all those men who were in the mine, they'd be safer actually for a short period because the gas would rise away from them...

Excerpted from the Tom Kirkham Oral History Project, Glenbow Library and Archives, University of Calgary.

For the full interview, see

<https://glenbow.ucalgary.ca/finding-aid/tom-kirkham-oral-history-project/>

* * * * *



Goodwin's "far fan up at Gold Creek".
Photos: John Kinnear



Book Review

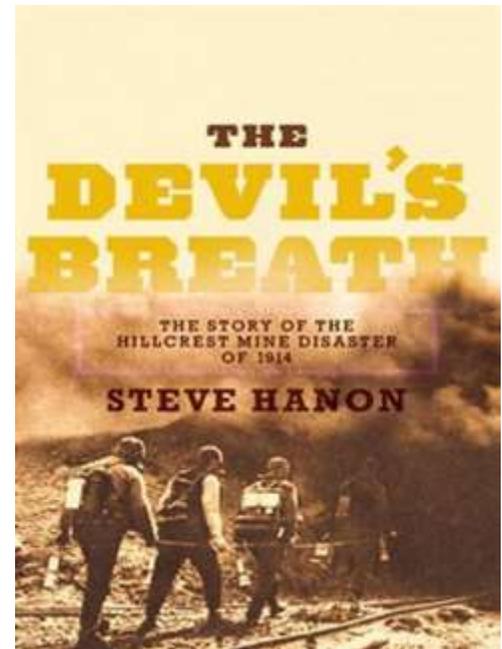
The Devil's Breath by Steve Hanon (2013)

Review by Ian McKenzie

When this book came out just before the 100th anniversary of the Hillcrest Mine Disaster, I was surprised that a book on this famous disaster had not been written before. *The Devil's Breath* will undoubtedly be the standard work on this topic for decades to come - barring new information, it is difficult to imagine that much more could be said.

The Devil's Breath begins with background on the development of the Crowsnest Pass and the Hillcrest Mine in particular, and includes an interesting biography on founder C. P. Hill. Details of the mine disaster and many of the personalities involved is followed by a description of the subsequent investigations, plus the politics which discouraged determining the exact cause of the explosion. That cause is the key question of this book and remains unanswered today, although Hanon leans towards a particular theory.

The level of detail in the book is impressive, even mentioning the number of telegraph operators at Hillcrest (four, apparently). Of particular interest to me were the handful of miners who somehow survived the horrors of the explosion, some even requiring resuscitation, who then went back in to try and help comrades or to retrieve bodies. Who amongst us today has that sort of mental toughness or sense of duty to friends?



If the book has a shortcoming, it is the limited follow-up on the lives of the many widows and orphans. Perhaps there was simply too little information available, which is unfortunate - the lives of even one bereaved family surely could fill a chapter. And Hanon misses the stories of those who, by chance, were not on shift that day when they should have been, and thus escaped death. These stories may have been more interesting and appropriate than the two anticlimactic end-chapters. There are a small number of inevitable errors, most not detectable by the average reader.

This book is an impressive work of research and engaging writing. No fan of Pass history can be without a copy of *The Devil's Breath* on their bookshelf. Big-box stores have it, but it is becoming hard to find in the Pass; the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre still has a few copies for sale, and it may be borrowed from the Crowsnest Pass Municipal Library.

Lyon Creek Hike

This hike is devoid of historic artifacts, but nonetheless carries a good story and provides a kilometre (round trip) of pleasant and easy walking. The oft-misspelled Lyon Creek is named after Harry Lyon, who had a rival homestead claim with Felix Montalbetti for the land around Blairmore's CPR station. Lyon had to lose a court ruling before titles could be issued; by then many lots already had homes and businesses on them. In 1911 Henry Lyon was elected Blairmore's first and most frustrating mayor, as he often acted in opposition to his council and embroiled the town in two lawsuits. Lyon served as Lt. Colonel of the 192nd recruiting battalion in the Pass, then served as a captain (later major) overseas in World War One. His house is a Blairmore landmark.



Lyon Creek winds its way through what was once Blairmore's first coal mine. The South Blairmore claim was purchased and developed by West Canadian Collieries, and operated from 1909 until 1913; not too long. The mine infrastructure was on both sides of the creek, but the last buildings and machinery disappeared when the gas pipeline was laid through it.

Park your car on 16th Avenue near 130th Street, where the pavement ends just shy of the creek. Walk directly to the creek shore, and pick your way upstream until you see

some old stables on the other side. Veer right and upslope just as you reach the toe of a wide gravel bar, insinuating yourselves between an old rail fence and the modern backyard fences of the 130 Street cul-de-sac. Some residents have manicured this area, but it is public land. Soon you break free of this narrow strip into a triangular field behind one of the larger yards; the mine's wash house, boiler house and power house once stood here. The mine entrance itself is now just a string of three collapses, across the creek at the top (south edge) of the pipeline cut about 50 metres west of Sartoris Road. An elevated wood trestle carried double-track from the entrance across the creek to the hilltop on your right, and then to the tipple. A CPR branch line ran where the angled 16th Avenue between 127th and 129th Streets is now, and continued on that angle almost to the creek. All of that is gone now.

Continue walking through some narrow pedestrian gaps in the rail fence, and across the wide pipeline clearing. Follow the trail through open woods above the right bank of Lyon Creek. A very pleasant stroll leads to a nice creekside picnic spot. Most walkers turn back here, but those with strong ankles and good balance (youth) can cross the creek several times for another 800m to a nice "waterfall" and heart-shaped pool.

If you don't like being barked at by dogs, an alternative is to walk through the Kids Corner Bike Park to the pipeline clearing.

News, 73 Years Ago

The year 1948 was a big one for Coleman movie-buffs, with a disastrous downtown fire being followed by the construction of a new theatre. Here are some excerpts from the *Coleman Journal*.

Thursday, February 19, 1948:

**Main Street Buildings Razed By Fire: \$116,000 Damage As Fire Raced Through Frame Buildings
Flames Fanned By An Estimated Fifty Miles Per Hour Gale; No Chance To Salvage Any Stock**

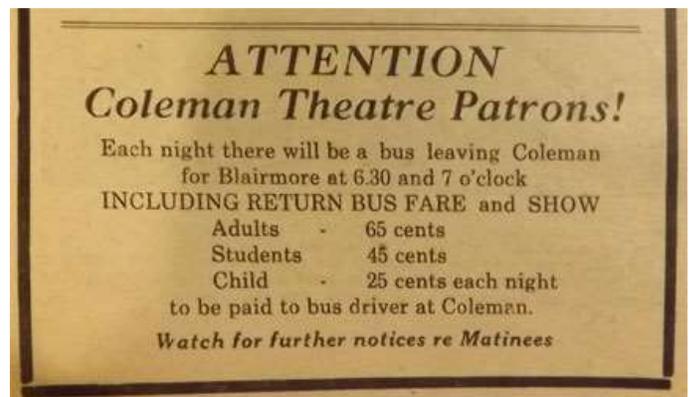
...The Purnell brothers are quite definite that they will construct a new theatre. It was too soon however to state definitely the material that would be used in the building's construction, and how large the theatre would be. Serious thought would be given to construction material and make it as thoroughly fire proof as possible. They suffered the greatest financial loss, that of \$23,000...

Mr. Fred Weir... has definitely decided not to build again. He revealed that he had come to final arrangements to sell his novelty store to a local couple and the deal would have been completed this week.... He also confided that while his building was burning he had been approached by some parties seeking to purchase the lots...

...Some persons unaware of the true facts of the situation let it be known to some daily papers that water pressure at Monday's fire

was inadequate. The actual reverse is true as the pressure was so strong that it required six men at times to control the hoses and keep the streams of water pouring into the fire.

Mr. Perry Dickieson, of the International Co., authorized the two mine pumps to go into action and Mr. Irvin Frew and Joe Malanchuk cleared the ice from the intake at the Crow's Nest River so that ample water could flow unmolested into the intake.

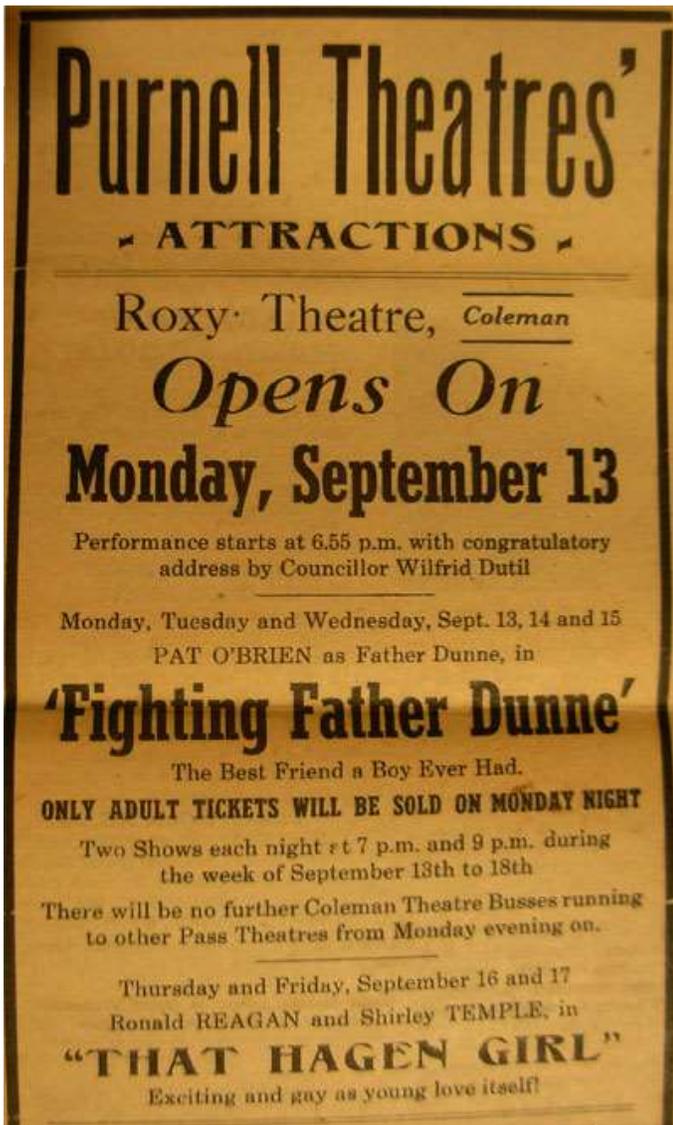


The Purnells bussed patrons to their Orpheum Theatre in Blairmore while the new Coleman theatre was under construction. *Coleman Journal*, various editions.

Thursday, September 16, 1948:

**Roxy Theatre Opened For Business Monday Evening; Councillor Dutil Delivered Congratulatory Message
Fine New Spacious And Luxurious Theatre Found Instant Favor With Coleman Patrons;
Polio Ban Kept Youngsters At Home**

Sparkling like a new pin Coleman's modern Roxy theatre opened wide its door on Monday evening to permit a capacity crowd to throng into its spacious interior and sit on soft leather bound chairs to enjoy the first



movie shown in Coleman since the disastrous fire last February which swept through a main street block gutting the old Palace theatre, Community hall and three business houses.

Two performances are being played nightly this week and the patrons attending the 7 p.m. performance on Monday heard Councillor W. Dutil, on behalf of the town, extend congratulations upon the construction of such a beautiful building and affording Coleman patrons the pleasure of once again being able to attend the movies amid such luxurious surroundings.

Theatre manager Ed Sonshor welcomed theatre patrons back to their own local theatre.

Mr. Don Purnell, speaking on behalf of Purnell Theatres, stated that it was with a great deal of pleasure that they opened the new Roxy theatre in Coleman. He stated that since it was a new theatre built on a new site that it was deserving of a new name and Roxy had been chosen...

More than half of the brick front is in doors boasting large plate windows. Four doors, when opened, permit easy passage of the crowds to and from the theatre. One enters the lobby from the street. Soft fluorescent lights on ceilings and walls add to the richness of the cedar panelled walls. The box office is set in the south west corner of the lobby. On the lobby floor is light colored Battleship Marloleum which will easily be kept clean.

Rich appearing curtains separate the lobby from the foyer. As one enters the foyer one steps on a heavy green carpet which absorbs the sound as one walks towards the theatre's two entrances. Once again soft wall lights permits one to walk to either entrance.

Curtains at each entrance shut off the light from the foyer. In the theatre proper are three rows of seats, the middle row being much wider than the two side rows. Four hundred and twenty soft leather covered seats have been placed in such a manner that nowhere in the theatre can one have an interrupted view of the screen.

Soft indirect light illuminates the theatre, the cream colored walls adding a touch of softness to the whole effect. A ventilating top ceiling draws away the hot stale air and aids in keeping fresh air circulating freely throughout the theatre. Two hot air ducts rise from the floor immediately inside the front of the theatre and form part of the wall near the two entrances.

There is no gallery in the Roxy.

The projection room boasts of strong high intensity arc lamps and high fidelity sound system which ranks with the best in southern Alberta, the cities included. The machines were tested on Monday afternoon and the sound was well nigh perfect, the theatre's acoustics being exceptionally good.

Between the rows of seats have been laid two long strips of left rugs. The front two rows of seats are double deckers or as one party described them, "love seats". These double seats are also scattered throughout the theatre. The backs of the seats are metal and have wooden arm rests.

A brand new screen has been set up and edged in black trim. Above the screen are three abbreviated rows of curtains. Across the screen are two large light green curtains which are electrically controlled.

A small stage stretched out beyond the screen and will prove adequate for speakers when required. At either side of the stage are a set of three massive pillars.

Mr. Ed. Somshor will be theatre manager and Mrs. Somshor cashier. Miss Annie

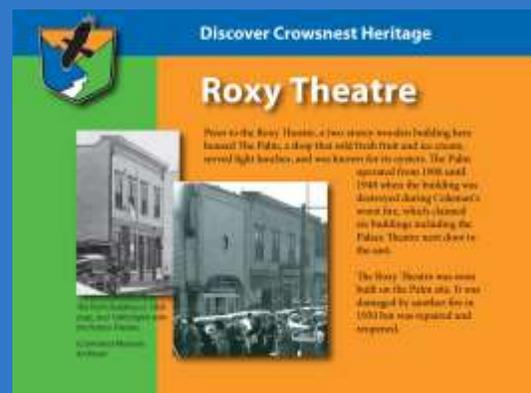
Tarcon, of West Coleman, has been employed as usher.

The entire roller-coaster of loss and rebirth was to occur again in just two years, when the new Roxy Theatre was gutted by another fire at the end of 1950.

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.

The Roxy Theatre displays a plaque explaining the site's long history.



Have you read it?

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



- **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