

HERITAGE VIEWS

History and Heritage in Crowsnest Pass, Alberta



Issue 65

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I was looking for an old photo of a Blairmore building, so I used a genealogical website to contact a descendant of its owner in New Zealand, who redirected me to a sixth cousin in California. Well, I didn't find the photo I wanted, but instead was shown a family history which became our heritage article, *The Sargents of Blairmore*.

This isn't the first winding trail to produce an article. *A Long Journey to Happiness: Marietta Mancini* (issue #55) evolved from a request for a headstone photo through the Find-A-Grave website. *The Matheson Brothers: Frank's Pioneer Newspaper Publishers* (#40) came from someone who had found our *Mark Drumm, Newspaperman* (#6) through a Google search. A chance meeting led to *Who Was Joe Little?* (#46). There are other examples of providential contacts, some found through deliberate work and others that just sort of

dropped into our laps. The trick is to recognize them when they come along, and pounce!

- Ian McKenzie, Editor

On the cover: Sydney Lionel Sargent (at right) and unknown friend at Blairmore, date unknown. Sydney left Blairmore before 1920 when he was age 16 or 17, but he looks older than that in this photo which may have been taken during a subsequent visit.

Photo provided by Thomas Freitas

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.cnp@gmail.com. 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

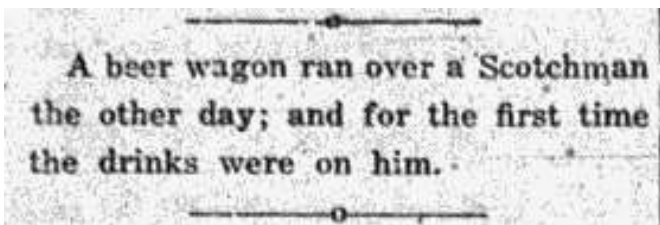
The derelict **Crowsnest Lake Dancehall** is expected to be demolished in the spring by the Province of Alberta. It is beyond repair and has become a significant public danger.

Alberta Environment and Parks is working on replacement panels for the porcupine-damaged memorial sign at the 1946 **York Creek Plane Crash** site. The draft sign panels look really great, and local historians are helping ensure their accuracy.

The annual **Harvest of Memories** fundraiser held on September 25, 2021 was a fully-virtual live event, as it was last year. Although not quite as successful as 2020, it was nevertheless a success with the Historical Society's funding target met.

The **Crowsnest Heritage Initiative** refreshed its executive at its AGM held at the end of October. Fred Bradley remains as president, Joey Ambrosi is the new VP, and Sacha Anderson is the new Secretary-Treasurer. Plus a handful of Directors.

The historic **Roxy Theatre**, located in Coleman National Historic Site, is completing its heritage renovation plan, and is pursuing grant, donation, and other funding. <https://www.crowsnestcando.ca/>.



Blairmore Enterprise, November 17, 1932

A new coffee-table book on the **Gushul family of photographers** is in the works.

Our **heritage facilities** all report another busy summer, mostly catering to Albertans. Some COVID-inspired changes are becoming permanent, such as online-only bookings and increased use of QR codes.

The 2022 **Doors Open and Heritage Festival** will be themed on the 100th anniversary of the murder of Cst. Stephen Lawson by Emilio Picariello and Florence Lossandro.

Did you know...

... that the two-storey green building on Blairmore's centre access downtown is the former Alberta Hotel, built in 1901?

... that in 1902 the Alberta Hotel was bought by Abraham Sparks, who would later purchase the Cosmopolitan hotel?

... that in 1912, the same year the Comopolitan Hotel burned down, the Alberta Hotel was moved 50 feet to the west so that its new addition would be on the corner?

... that the Alberta Hotel was once owned by Emilio "Emperor Pic" Picariello, and then by his widow?

The Sargents of Blairmore

by Thomas Freitas

Some years back I became interested in genealogy and started reading on how to obtain information on past relatives, as well as present ones! My journey began with asking my mother and maternal grandmother for information pertaining to the family. This is tricky, since a lot of information is not as accurate as one might think. For example, I was told that my grandfather was born in the state of Washington in July of 1899. It turned out that he was born in Blairmore, Canada on September 7, 1902. The reason for this fabrication was that he wanted to get into the United States Navy, and he was not a citizen and was not of age. More on that later.

Sydney James Sargent (1874-1960)

The Sargent family comes from England where they had resided for centuries, mostly in the Middlesex and Surrey areas of England. The journey to Blairmore started with Sydney James Sargent. He was born January 4, 1874, in Chelsea, Middlesex, England. On March 24, 1892, at the age of 18 Sydney and a friend, Charles Osborne, sailed from Liverpool to Halifax, Canada on the ship *S.S. Parisian*. (Interesting enough, this ship was the same ship that picked up survivors from the *S.S. Titanic* in the sinking of 1910.) The ships log states that Sydney James Sargent was single, 20 years old (he was actually 18 years 3 months old), and his

occupation was that of a laborer. It is not known why Sydney wanted to go to Canada! There may have been other family members that had gone there and related their experiences to him, or he may have simply heard about land grants there and wanted to make the adventure.

In June of 1898, Sydney found some land that he wanted around Gillingham, north of Pincher Creek, and in May of 1899 he built a house on the property. The house was 20 X 24 feet and built of Pop Lumber and was valued at \$250.00. He also erected a stable which was valued at \$100.00. He then went back to England and married Minnie Barnard, most likely in 1899, when he was 25 and Minnie was 21. They lived on the Gillingham ranch between June 10, 1899 and September 5, 1899, and between May 5, 1900 and September 5, 1900. During the times that they did not live there, it is presumed that they went back to England. Their ranch started out in 1898 with 2 horses and 32 head of cattle, which fluctuated over time and eventually included 6 horses and 1 pig. They only farmed about ½ acre of land for the first two years, then in 1901 and 1902 they expanded to 6 acres of farming.

The 1901 census described Sydney as a rancher with their religion noted as Church of England. On September 14, 1901, in Pincher Creek, Sydney and Minnie

welcomed their first child, Violet Minnie May Sargent. The Sargents moved to a small house in Blairmore, and opened the Crows Nest Flour and Feed store. On September 7, 1902, they welcomed their second child, Sydney Lionel Sargent. Their son's middle name is presumably taken from Sydney James Sargent's brother's middle name, Harry Lionel Sargent. Both Sydney James and Sydney Lionel would spell their first name as either Sidney or as Sydney throughout their lives.



Father and son, about 1910.

Photo provided by Thomas Freitas

Sydney James was a very strict man that showed very little emotions. He would give his wife an exact amount of money each month to live on and that would be all that she would get. Around 1916, while living in Blairmore, Minnie took up with another man and one day got up and left Sydney and the children and moved to Spokane, Washington in the United States.

After Minnie had left, Sydney decided that it would be best for the children to go to a boarding school. They apparently attended St. Michaels's school in Pincher Creek and stayed at the Convent. Sydney James

Sargent continued with his trips between England and Canada. Whenever he was back in Canada, his children would come to the ranch and the family, minus Minnie, would once again be re-united. Pictures of the children and their father show the appearance of a happy family.

Sydney James met Edith, his future second wife, sometime around 1917 in England. Shortly after constructing a new brick building for his Crows Nest Flour and Feed



Crows Nest Flour and Feed store, ca 1922; the building still stands today. Photo provided by Thomas Freitas

Co, Sydney James sold everything by 1923, bought a house at 9 Kings Avenue in New Malden, Surrey, England, and lived there for the rest of his life.

Violet Minnie May Sargent (1901-1991)

Violet Sargent remained at school in Pincher Creek until around 1918/1919. In July of 1920, she was accepted to the staff of the Pincher Creek Memorial Hospital. This was her dream, to work in the medical field! She trained at the Galt Hospital in Lethbridge where she graduated in July of 1921. She returned to Blairmore to become a matron of a small hospital until her marriage in

1923. She then moved to Ontario where she and her husband had five children; two boys and three girls. She died on January 3, 1991, in Sault St. Marie, Ontario.



Family photo, date unknown.
Photo provided by Thomas Freitas

Sydney Lionel Sargent (1902-1942)

Sydney Lionel Sargent loved horses and the cowboy way! In photos of him in Blairmore, he is riding horses. Later he even had tattoos on his left forearm of a "horseshoe and horse head" and on his right forearm of a "cowboy on a bucking horse."

Sydney Lionel Sargent missed his mother, and it is believed that he did not get along with his father. When he was around 16

years old he tried to run away to Spokane, Washington where his mother lived. Each time he ran away he was caught. However, the last time he ran away he made it to Spokane and moved in with his mother. Sydney Lionel was very interested in sailing and on January 27, 1920 he enlisted into the Navy, lying about his age and citizenship, so he could qualify to get in. His enlistment papers described him as 5' 7", 132 pounds, Blue Eyes, Brown Hair and a "Ruddy" complexion. He was assigned to the Naval Training Station in San Francisco on November 28, 1920, and his training ended on February 4, 1921. He then went to the Naval Hospital, Mare Island, California on February 5, until December 14, 1921 when he was assigned to the *U.S.S. Nitro*.

According to a story that Sydney and his wife Ada both told their daughter, their meeting was sometime in late 1922. Ada was on the ferry boat going to San Francisco as was Sydney with a bunch of his Navy pals. Ada was sitting on a sun chair on the deck with her coat on, eating a chocolate bar and reading a book. Sydney's friends challenged Sydney to try and make a date with the woman in the chair. Ada got up from the chair to go inside the ferry boat to get something to eat. She left her coat, book and chocolate bar on the chair to save it for when she returned. When she returned, Sydney was sitting in her chair, with her coat on, eating her chocolate and pretending to be reading her book. The story goes that seven days later they were married. Ada already had one child at the time, Lina May Nissen, who later went by the name of Doris.



Sydney
Lionel
Sargent and
Nitehawk,
date
unknown.

Photo
provided by
Thomas
Freitas

It is believed that Sydney Lionel could speak some Chinese. There was a story about a boy that came over to date Doris, and Sydney started speaking Chinese. Sydney told the boy that he, as well as Doris, were half Chinese. Apparently, the boy did not like that and never came back again. (*The 1916 census shows that the Sargents had Chinese neighbors in Blairmore - Ed.*)

Sydney received his Navy discharge papers on November 25, 1922. On January 18, 1923, Sydney decided to re-enlist. On March 31, 1923 he was assigned to the *U.S.S. Newport News*. On February 15, 1924 he was given a discharge from the Navy.

Sydney and Ada had two children, Violet Ada (named after his sister), and Sydney Lionel (named after himself), in addition to Lina May ("Doris") from Ada's previous marriage.

Sydney's main interest after leaving the Navy was acting! He was in many stage productions around the San Francisco Bay Area. His dream was to be in the movies as a cowboy. He worked on a Dude Ranch

riding and maintaining horses in a small town called Volcano, California.

On December 8, 1942, Sydney entered the U.S. Marina Hospital in San Francisco, California. His diagnosis was that he had Rheumatic fever and Mitral stenosis, a condition that he suffered from for 24 years. Three days later on December 11, 1942, at 11:32 P.M., he died of acute heart failure due to the above two conditions. He was only 39 years old. His funeral card had a picture of him with a cowboy hat on in memory of his love for cowboying. The picture was taken from the headshot for his acting career.

The Century Home Club

Address: 13205 22 Ave, Blairmore.

Year built: possibly 1902.

Features: Porch has been removed and an addition made on east side.

Significant occupants: Sydney James Sargent, owner of Crows Nest Flour and Feed Company.



Sargent house, date unknown. Photo provided by Thomas Freitas, California

A History of “The Cos”

By Ian McKenzie

The earliest known photograph of the Cosmopolitan Hotel is hand-inscribed “Blairmore N.W.T. 1901” and clearly shows it and about a dozen other commercial buildings. From this it is clear that the first Cosmopolitan Hotel was in existence in 1901; however, since owner Harry Howard lists his occupation as “hotel manager” on the March 31, 1901 national census, it could be suggested that the hotel had been built the previous summer.

Title issuances were delayed because of a land dispute over the entire quarter-section surrounding the train station, and as you can see from the photograph there were several buildings constructed in Blairmore without titles!

The original Cosmopolitan Hotel was an attractive, thirty-room, two storey wooden structure with attic dormers and a boomtown false front. A one storey



“Blairmore N.W.T. 1901” Photo: Crowsnest Museum and Archives

1 train station 2 Alberta Hotel 3 Cornwall Hotel (later the Blairmore Hotel) 4 Cosmopolitan Hotel

According to the September 6, 1902 edition of the *Frank Sentinel*,

The first person to receive a certificate of title for lots in the Blairmore townsite is H. Howard, who has received such for lots 1 and 2, Block 4 [the Cosmopolitan Hotel property], from the Land Titles office for South Alberta Land Registration District, at Calgary, bearing date of August 28th, 1902.

addition on the east held the Cosmopolitan Bar. Blairmore’s first wedding occurred in the dining room in 1903 (by Reverend Donald McPhail, later lost on the *Titanic*). In 1910 a steam heating plant was added, and that same year a two storey annex behind the hotel was built and attached by a walkway overtop the alley. This annex opened in 1911; the ground floor was leased to Merral Osborne and later to F. W. Hogg and A. J. Lessard as a pool hall, with a four-

bedroom, one-bathroom rooming house operation upstairs. The main floor was also used as sample rooms for salesmen.



The original Cosmopolitan Hotel, centre, between 1902 - 1905.
Photo: Crowsnest Museum and Archives

Harry Howard did not always abide by the law; for example in 1906 he was fined \$20 and costs for “permitting dice in his bar-room.” For a while he was obliged to take out the Cosmopolitan Hotel’s liquor license in the name of his brother-in-law, James Boyle. In 1911 he lost his licence entirely, and threatened a libel suit against the *Blairmore Enterprise* for their jubilant editorializing. In 1911 the License Commissioners refused to issue a liquor license to the Cosmopolitan Hotel as long as Howard was its owner. Howard then sold the hotel to Abraham A. Sparks in August 1911 for an estimated \$40,000. Harry Howard moved to Victoria, BC and went into real estate.

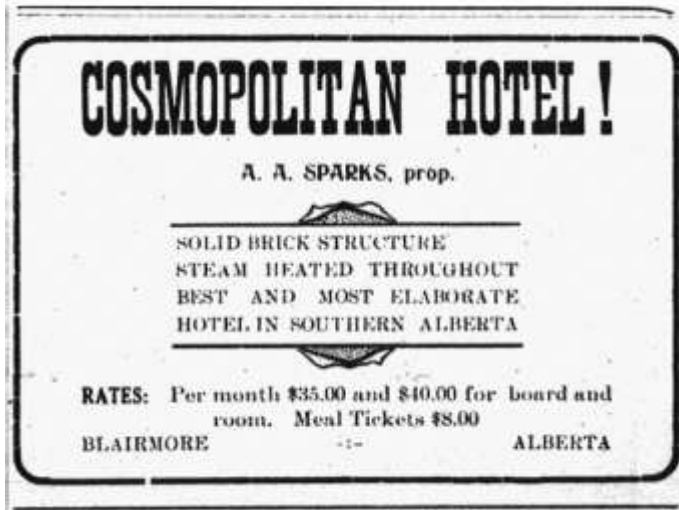
Abraham Sparks knew the hotel business, having previously been the proprietor of the Alberta Hotel, and began renovations

shortly afterwards. Eight months later it was all gone.

Disaster struck the night of March 25, 1912, when a fire broke out in the rear of the new Kalil Block next door. Fire brigades from Blairmore, Coleman, Frank, and Bellevue worked at the blaze, but despite the calm, windless conditions the fire consumed the Cosmopolitan Hotel as well as Kalil’s store, a real estate office and a jewellery store, and damaged the Thomas Ede building. The Blairmore Hotel, across the street from the Cosmopolitan Hotel, was also scorched but not seriously damaged. The rooming house annex to the rear was saved by tearing away the aerial walkway. One person died in the blaze. Frederico Calabrese had initially escaped from his room in the Cosmopolitan Hotel but returned to the burning building, presumably to retrieve something of value from his room. His body was discovered on Tuesday morning.

Sparks promptly embarked on planning a replacement building, and engaged contractors Alex Albetis for the brick and masonry work, and Frayer & Sinclair for the interior. The present hotel opened in October 1912. It was steam-heated, with hot and cold running water, and a telephone in every room. A five-foot wainscot of green and brown burlap graced the interior, and the entry rotunda had leather chairs and a

leather-padded seat around the central pillar.



Blairmore Enterprise advertisement, 1915

With its central location and imposing height, the Cosmopolitan Hotel became Blairmore's premiere hotel. Its dining room was often used by social clubs, conventions, and sports teams for dances and dinners. The hotel was a sponsor of a local hockey team, who played on the open-air ice just across Victoria Avenue.

As a result of a province-wide plebiscite, the sale of alcohol in Alberta became illegal in 1916. Residents of the Crowsnest Pass had voted "wet" and consequently were sympathetic if not outright supportive of the various means to import and serve alcohol illegally. "Rum-runners" such as Emilio "Emperor Pic" Picariello, Mike Rosse, and others supplied alcohol from British Columbia and elsewhere for the serving of drinks in "blind pigs," providing the Pass with some of its most colourful history.

The Cosmopolitan Hotel bar had to convert to the sale of "soft drinks" but it is known

that they quietly continued to serve illegal alcoholic drinks. In 1917 the Cosmopolitan Hotel ownership passed to the Fernie Brewery Company and George G. McCollom.

The dining room continued to be popular, becoming the home of the Blairmore Social Club, the Crowsnest Pass Automobile Association and others. In April 1920 the hotel was sold to Maxim Belecky, who also owned the Napanee Hotel in Fernie; McCollom moved to Vancouver.

Conflict with the enforcers of the Alberta Liquor Act came to a head in October 1920 when Frank Delaney, a sort of undercover snitch, confronted the clerk of the Cosmopolitan Hotel over a room dispute brandishing a pistol. After forcibly obtaining a \$3.00 room refund, Delaney was subsequently charged with armed robbery until the Attorney General of Alberta intervened in November to have the charges dropped.

In 1921 the former bar space was leased to the Home Bank. The bank's spectacular collapse in 1923 resulted in one of Canada's first government bailouts.

Prohibition in Alberta ended in 1924, and the bar was quickly renovated and reopened. The Cosmopolitan Hotel in Blairmore and the Empire Hotel in Coleman were the first in the Pass to obtain licences under the new Alberta Liquor Control Act. Some problems persisted though; in 1926 the Cosmopolitan received a ten-day liquor licence suspension.

The Cosmopolitan Hotel changed hands several times between the 1920s and the present day.

In September 1930, Greyhound inaugurated its bus service through the Crowsnest Pass, with its scheduled Blairmore stop at the

After World War Two, the Annex across the alley from the main hotel was used as an army surplus store. The Annex was destroyed by fire in 1948.

In 1959 owner Sonny Richards and partners changed the hotel's name to The Pass Hotel.

Cosmopolitan Hotel in the mid-1920s. Note the wooden annex at its rear (far left).

Photo: Crowsnest Museum and Archives



Cosmopolitan Hotel. In 1935 the hotel acquired its neon sign, one of the first on Blairmore's main street.

In 1936, Mayor Bill Knight, of Blairmore's famous 'communist' town council, held a banquet in the Cosmopolitan Hotel's dining room with Tim Buck as his guest of honor. Tim Buck was the once-imprisoned leader of Canada's communist party, and the Mayor and Council had named the main street boulevard after him (a decision reversed by the next council in 1936).

In December, 1982, fire damaged the hotel's interior. The hotel reopened in 1983 with repairs and upgrades partially funded by a heritage grant, which required the hotel to return to its historic name, the Cosmopolitan Hotel.

Some believe that the Cosmopolitan Hotel is haunted by a gentle ghost, and have suggested that it might be that of Anna Kubik, an employee killed in a car-train accident that claimed six lives in 1936.

Coal Mine Work: Q&A with Steve Liska (1914-2006)

Excerpts from a 2005 Oral History interview by the Alberta Labour History Institute

I was born in Broderick, Saskatchewan. Came to Coleman when I was three or four, and been here ever since. Went to school here, lived all my life here.

When did you go to work in the mine?

Oh, I forget the year. I was 21 I guess, when I started in the mine . . .

How long did you work in the mine?

All my life practically. Underground about 30 or over 30 years. Then after I left underground I went to work as a check weighman. The miners wanted me to be the check weighman. You know what that is? The miners, when they load the cars in the mine, they have these check tabs. When you load a car, there's a hook inside the car and they put a check on there. When it comes out to the scale, they take the tab off, drop it through a little chute, and you record the weight. That goes to the miners. Two miners worked together always, not one. They all got paid by the coal they got.

Was that the last job that you did, a weighman?

No, then they give me a job as a timekeeper. I did that until I quit when I was 65 years old.

What was the first job you had in the mine?

First job? Bucking coal. The coal comes down a chute. Where it's flat or wet and sticks, you have to get in there with your feet and push the coal down and get it going so they could load it in the bottom.

Can you explain what a rope rider is?

The hoist man has an indicator that shows him exactly to the foot where that cable is at, where the cars are at. Say he comes down to one level, he stops there and you throw the switch, and you go and drop your cars in there, hook up the loads which are there. Usually you unhook it, you ring the bell, and you hook the load. That's how fast they used to go. He's winding the loose cable, because he's got to give you so much slack.

It was all done by a bell system?

By a bell, that's right.

When you worked in the mine, did you ever have horses down there?

Yes. We took one down one day, me and my partner. The level was up a little bit. That horse, when he come to where the ground went up, he thought he was going back outside. He wanted to gallop up there.

How deep were you in some of these mines?

Five level was about 5,500 feet. Down there it used to bump. Just like if you were setting up dynamite in the mine, the whole mine would shake. That's the way it was. One day the miners come down on the trip, they didn't know if they should back out or not. There were about 3 bumps. Shook the whole works.

Was all the mining done with dynamite, or did you do drilling?

No, no, just air picks. Not with dynamite. You blasted rock with dynamite. But any time you blasted the rock, you had to use rock dust. Put a bag of rock dust to kill the coal dust. It would get mixed with the coal dust so it wouldn't explode.

What was Bellevue mine like as a place to work?

Bellevue was the best. McGillivray was the worst. It was full of gas, full of bumps. The further it went that way, the more it used to bump.

Were you ever involved in any accidents or injuries in the mine?

I had no injuries. I was really fortunate. But accidents; one day at four level, there was a lot of dust in there. They had a fault. You wouldn't know what a fault is. Say you've got a seam of coal 10 feet high or 8 feet high. It goes and then it comes together. The rock benches it out. That's what you call a fault. These places all went up to this fault,

then they start pillaring the coal out. When they pillar it, they take everything. First they drive roofs up, that's for your own safety. Then they pillar the coal out. From one side they angle in this way, from the other side they angle in the other way. This time they pillared and the fault was holding the roof. When they pillar the coal out, usually it used to cave. This time it didn't. They took so damn much out, like a football field full. When that caved, can you imagine what happens? A concussion of air pressured down. There was coal dust, rock dust. You see about 100 men running out the mine.



This one guy says, 'For Christ sake run kid! It's gonna blow up any minute!' And it just was a miracle it didn't blow up. All the guys ran out of four level that time . . . After it caved, the next day he sent us down there to timber one place. The whole mine was white from grinding rock. Then the carpenter, Johnny [?], any time they pillared the coal out, they sent him to make cradles between

the timbers and put rock dust on. So when it caved, it took the rock dust into the air and mixed with the coal dust.

What's rock dust made out of?

Limestone. They used that all over . . .

Your dad and brother worked in Bellevue, and you worked in McGillivray.

Yes. And them bumps, like I was telling you, two guys got killed with a bump. When it

bumped the floor up, they got killed. One got killed right away, the other one died in the hospital. Another one, Danny McLellan, he was putting in chute again. The bottom bumped, sheet arch cut him here in the groin. That's the way it was. And that's the way that Sekora across the street got killed. The coal bumped and covered his partner up. He tried to get him out. He couldn't, so he ran across to the neighbors. He went back first. By the time the other guys came, another bump and covered him up. Young man. Lost his life.

What did they do to improve the safety conditions in the mine?

If something happened, usually they'd say, 'Well the inspector is coming. We gotta fix this and that.' I'll tell you an incident that happened to me. I was riding the rope, dropping these cars. The clevis is a thing you hook cars with. It's sparking like crazy and the [hoist?] stopped. I went to the phone. A guy by the name of George Birchill was on the phone. I said, 'George, what happened? The clevis was sparking like hell down here.' He says, 'Lightning struck the hoist through and went all the way down the cable four levels.' Next day you know where they were? The bosses were on top grounding the bull wheels so if anything happened again it'll ground itself . . . If I didn't have rubber boots maybe I'd have got electrocuted. I don't know.

Were you ever trained for rescue work?

No, I used to go to first aid, that's all. The doctor used to teach you at that time. We

had doctors, and each one would take a turn on a Sunday and go there and teach you first aid. We got a shirt and tie out of it one time . . .

When you worked with partners, what was the division of labour?

It was split even. The coal that went out was split between the two of you . . . If you shoveled the coal, you were paid 72 cents a ton; 69 cents if you dug it with an air pick.

How did your pay change over time?

It changed quite a bit. When we started I was getting \$4.45 a day . . .

How did a person get a job in a mine?

The mine used to work two or three days. You'd go up there and stand there like a dummy, 30 or 40 of you. The boss would walk around for a while and then he'd come out, 'My god, nothing doing today boys.' And you'd go back home or go down to International. They used to check out a little later. McGillivray would check out at 3:30, and down here, 4 o'clock. You did that every time the mine worked. You know how long I went up there? Two years.

Of standing around, trying to get a job?

Yes. There was no jobs . . .

The full content of this Alberta Labour History Institute oral history interview is at <https://albertalabourhistory.org/interview-transcripts/steve-and-liz-liska/>

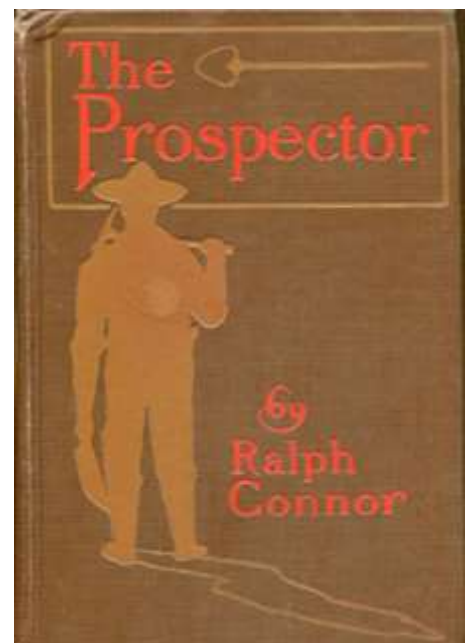
Book Review

The Prospector by Ralph Connor (1904)

Review by Ian McKenzie

Over a century ago Ralph Connor, the pen-name for Rev. Charles Gordon, was Canada's best-known novelist with record sales throughout North America. *The Prospector* features a rugged, manly missionary whose Christian morality is employed against the frontier's roughest local characters. "Shock" Macgregor leaves his beloved mother and a chance for an easy cultured life in Toronto in order to bring religion and morality to the wild west. His adventures centre on a ranching outpost somewhere in the foothills, and later move into the mountain mining camps. This missionary prospector "digs up" lost souls in the remote mountains, an inland version of the "fisher of men" metaphor.

The subtitle of this novel is "A Tale of the Crow's Nest Pass," but the story is pure fiction with no mention of Crowsnest, its towns, or anywhere else recognizable. Readers might assume that "the Fort" is Ft. Macleod and "the Pass" is Crowsnest Pass but, other than the Kootenays being further west, the geography simply does not match. The plot incorporates a lost gold mine which is reminiscent of the Lost Lemon Mine, and an enormous landslide which would be an unlikely literary device had it not been for the actual Frank Slide the year before this book was released. Other than that, the book could be set anywhere in the Eastern Slopes and I wonder if the subtitle was a marketing addition by the publisher.



As in his other works (see our review of *The Doctor* in issue #55), Connor's personal views manifest themselves in *The Prospector*. His dislike of Eastern snobbery, and his opinion that strict Christian orthodoxy was unsuited to the frontier, come through strongly, as does his obvious respect for the real-life Superintendent of Home Missions in the portrayal of his fictional counterpart. Most revealing is a simple bit of advice given to Shock Macgregor when faced with the daunting task of public speaking: "Don't preach at them. Tell them yarns." And yarns are told in *The Prospector*: there's a violent rugby game, fist-fights, drinking and gambling, drawn pistols, heartbreak and redemption, and love interests.

Long out of print, *The Prospector* sometimes shows up in used book stores, and can be purchased online. Chinook Arch regional library system has other Ralph Connor novels, but not this one. Six of his books were made into movies - here's one: <https://youtu.be/-Uz5RoC0sFg>.

Coal and Chert Circuit

A big concrete block near the skyline above Bellevue was part of the infrastructure of the Maple Leaf/Mohawk Mine - probably a hoist house for moving coal cars between levels. A two-kilometre fairly steep trail takes you there, with an additional easier 3km through the ancient chert quarries for a nice loop back to your car.

Drive to the hairpin in the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre access road, and follow the gravel road across the cattleguard for 1.5km to a major T-junction. *Don't turn left*; go straight for another 250m, then park at a crossroad. Driving further is difficult and pointless, as this is a loop hike.



Walk up the steep and rutted main road continuation for 750m to a clearing. A track continues uphill, and follows a shallow treed gully. The trail is steep but well-defined. After about 750m the trail wanders off to the left, then cuts back right, across the gully - watch for rusty hoist cables on the ground here. You enter trees, then hook back left and suddenly the big ruin appears over your right shoulder.

Check out this interesting ruin of concrete and hollow clay blocks, typical of West Canadian Collieries construction. Be very careful, and do nothing destructive.

Continue up the road towards the internet tower on the summit, some 400m away. This is near the famous Raptor Migration observation point where you used to see researcher Peter Sherrington, with notepad and binoculars, recording the passing of Bald and Golden Eagles overhead.

Walk along the ridge to where the big powerline crosses the ridge, about 500m to the north. This will take you through the chert quarries, but honestly there is almost nothing to see. Digging with sticks and their bare hands, folks 8000 years ago didn't make the same sorts of quarries as we do today. If you find chunks of chert laying about, please leave them in place.

Descend the steep pipeline road to the left (west). This road is not the most pleasant thing, and you'll want to get off it at the earliest opportunity, particularly on a hot day! Leave the road where it first briefly levels off, by taking the grass slope descending to the left, towards the creek. This slope becomes a pleasant overgrown road, which fades out but then becomes very distinct again. Where the road crosses the creek, you can explore around for some old mine infrastructure. The road leads you right back to your car.

Please respect your natural and historic surroundings. Try to avoid being gnawed on by bears or cougars, although you are more likely to be mooed by a cow or gobbled by a wild turkey.

News 100 Years Ago

These snippets, each a separate item from the December 1, 1921 edition of the *Blairmore Enterprise*, illuminate the editor's opinion of the province's Prohibition (anti-alcohol) legislation.

Several cases against Colemanites for infractions of the famous liquor act were concluded at Coleman last week end, when three well-known citizens were sentenced on second offence convictions to three months at hard labor. Their bodies were removed to Lethbridge on Friday night, while their wives and children mourned their loss.

Sergt. Nicholson raided the premises of an old offender on Tuesday night, taking therefrom a washtub with its sud contents and some other materials supposed to serve as evidence towards conviction.

Going to jail on evidence submitted by a stool-pigeon should either send a Canadian away from his country or to suicide. It's a black mark on our so-called civilization when we have to use the evidence of the lowest down people in the land to send a better class to jail.

If the Alberta Liquor Act was amended so that second offence would be punishable by a heavy money fine instead of imprisonment, the government would be in a position to employ and treat more stool-pigeons. No doubt, there are lots of ex-criminals and would-be criminals in this province of ours, who are absolutely no good for anything else, who would gladly accept positions.

Why is it that the police, apparently aware that a car of beer is being shipped in or is spotted on the siding, make no attempt to grab that beer until it is stored in the cellars of parties who are assured by the dealer that it is within-the-law stuff? Is it that the police or other authorities are linked up with the wholesaler or is it that by allowing its distribution they are assured of many penalties and many more possible criminals instead of only one? If the latter, then it cannot be said of the act that it is framed more in the interest of temperance than in bleeding the pockets of our citizens.

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 building plaque for Kubik's Grocery, on Blairmore's main street, mentions the Crows Nest Flour and Feed Company.



Have you read it?

Our Local Heritage Sites (check websites for rates, schedules, and COVID closures)



- **CROWNEST MUSEUM and ARCHIVES** - 7701 18th Avenue, in Coleman National Historic Site. 403-563-5434, cnmuseum@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, plus large artifacts outdoors. Gift shop features local and regional books, and many other items.



BARRACKS

- 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, cnmuseum@shaw.ca , www.appbarracks.com.



- **BELLEVUE UNDERGROUND MINE** - off Main Street in Bellevue. The premiere authentic historic underground coal mine tour of western Canada offers a family-oriented experience of what miners from a century ago saw and heard at work each day. Pre-book tours online; www.bellevuemine.com.



- **FRANK SLIDE INTERPRETIVE CENTRE** - off Hwy 3. 403-562-7388, www.frankslide.ca. Knowledgeable staff share fascinating stories of the Frank Slide of April 1903 through dynamic interpretive programs and presentations. State-of-the-art interactive exhibits focus on Canada’s deadliest rockslide. Closed winter Mondays (but open Family Day).



- **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 adjacent **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. Parking lot closed in winter. 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