

# HERITAGE VIEWS

History and Heritage in Crowsnest Pass, Alberta



Issue 66

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September 21<sup>st</sup> of this year will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the shooting of Constable Stephen Lawson, for which Emilio Picariello and Florence Lossandro were arrested and subsequently hanged. This episode is the tragic but sensational high-mark of our prohibition/rumrunning heritage, and ranks amongst the most famous bits of our local history (and we have a lot of competition there). If you need a refresher course on this event, a visit to the Alberta Provincial Police Barracks in Coleman is highly recommended.

One of our heritage articles in this issue was written by Tommy "Yukon" Ng, Senior Project Archaeologist with Bison Historical Services, and is published with the consent of his client. An interview with Tommy appeared in our issue #56, from September 2019 when he was working on various Grassy Mountain sites.

- Ian McKenzie, Editor

On the cover: Drone view of the excavated archaeological site HS 73184, near Grassy Mountain, as it appeared in the summer of 2020.

Photo: Tommy Ng, Bison Historical Services Ltd

*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](mailto: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](http://www.crowsnestheritage.ca) by clicking on the "heritage newsletter" link on the home page.

# Local 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.

An image of Emilio “Emperor Pic” Picariello appeared on the rear of the former **Alberta Hotel** last November. Pic owned the hotel up to his execution for the murder of Constable Stephen Lawson, 100 years ago.



John Estacio, who co-wrote the opera *Filumena*, was invested into the Order of Canada in December. *Filumena* is based on the story of Florence “Philumena” Lossandro.

The Municipality of Crowsnest Pass has provided some financial support towards

**The dairymaid milked the pensive goat  
And, panting, paused to mutter :  
“I wish, you brute, you’d turn to milk,”  
And the animal turned to butt her.**

*Blairmore Enterprise*, December 1, 1921

the restoration and reopening of the historic **Roxy Theatre**, in Coleman National Historic Site. <https://www.crowsnestcando.ca/>

The July/August 2022 **Doors Open and Heritage Festival** will be themed on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the murder of Cst. Stephen Lawson by Emilio Picariello and Florence Lossandro, which is “Canada’s most infamous rumrunning murder.”

The former **Cruikshank Store/Masonic Hall** in Hillcrest is receiving a new roof structure, which will extend the life of the building but adds about a metre of height to this already visually-altered historic building.

## Did you know...

... that Crowsnest Pass is the richest and most intensively-studied archaeological district in the Canadian Rockies?

... that hundreds of post-glacial indigenous sites have been identified in the Pass?

... that a skull of the extinct Mountain Buffalo was discovered in Bellevue while digging for new sewer lines in 1974?

... that the earliest signs of humans in the Pass, a few Clovis Culture tools about 11,000 years old, were found near Frank?

## THE FURNACE, An Archaeologist's Perspective

by Tommy Ng,  
Bison Historical Services Ltd

To me this historical feature started as a grassy hump, was uncovered as a buried structure, and ended as ***the furnace***. HS 73184, its provincial designation, was first found by an archaeologist in 1974 and was described as two parallel concrete walls about 50cm apart, measuring approximately 2m in length, and found embedded in the ground and stemming out from a grassy hump. Nothing more was said about the historical feature; what it was, or its possible function. It was left for a future archaeologist to examine it further. That future archaeologist would be me, 40 years later.

In the spring and summer of 2015, HS 73184 was exactly as described in 1974. To me the two parallel concrete walls looked like a channel, which meant it was used to transport some sort of load either in or out, or both. The grassy hump was obviously a buried structure that was grown over.

North of the grassy hump is a scenic view of



Grassy Mountain, and there are a set of mountains very far to the south. Grassy Mountain Road is immediately west and beyond it. The terrain ascends towards the open pit mines operated by West Canadian Collieries from the late 1940s to the late 1950s. East of the grassy hump, the terrain slopes down into a lodgepole pine forest with a creek wandering through it.

As a provincially accredited archaeologist, I am bound by the legalities and regulations of the *Historical Resources Act* which came in effect in Alberta in 1973. In 2015, I was mandated to look for new archaeological sites, and revisit previously recorded archaeological sites including heritage buildings, within the defined boundaries of the Riversdale Resources Coal Project.

As per standard practice, my crew and I excavated a series of shovel tests in and around the grassy hump. Shovel testing is the most common archaeological method used to identify buried archaeological sites, find artifacts, define the size and shape of a site, and/or determine the site's function. Our shovel tests on the grassy hump didn't go far in depth, as we kept encountering brick fragments and miscellaneous unidentifiable metal items. These artifacts only reiterated to me that something was buried, but it wasn't enough for me to hazard an educated guess.

Additionally, I conducted a deep test with a

backhoe next to the grassy hump to examine the soil built up next to HS 73184 and to see if there was the potential for a deeply buried unidentified archaeological site. The backhoe excavated to a depth of over 2m and water was encountered. I knew this was not the water table but slope run-off, since the terrain is a slope and far from the nearest creek. The soils from the deep test are highly mottled, meaning they are a mess and a mixture of soil types which are generally an indicator of disturbance, and that the ground had been dug up. This led me to believe that dirt was moved around the grassy hump, and suggested that whatever was underneath the grassy hump had been intentionally buried.

I recommended to the provincial government that a few excavation units measuring 1m by 1m square be excavated over the grassy hump. My recommendations were approved, but it would be 2019 when I was given the opportunity to excavate the grassy hump.

In 2019 and with an excavation mandate, six excavation units were placed on the perceived top of the grassy hump, lined up with the concrete channel. Two brick structures were revealed: a brick wall perpendicular to the concrete channel, and a ziggurat-like or stepped firebrick cribbing connected to the concrete channel, plus a layer of brick and metal rubble, which was enough to inform me that the structure had been intentionally buried.

Based on previous archaeological works, I speculated that the buried structure was the

remains of a boiler house, perhaps a platform for a boiler. This speculation was based on the proximity of the water well / pump house 100m to the northeast that was identified in 2015, and the availability and accessibility of coal from the mining operations of West Canadian Collieries since 1908. Two important components for a boiler - water for steam, and coal to generate heat. What was missing was the boiler itself; what it was for, and why at this locale?



At this point, I had enough information to recommend to the provincial government that the entire grassy hump be excavated. I walked around the hump, using its shape, the concrete channel, and the exposed brickwork as my guide. I estimated 40 square metres or 40 excavation units would be adequate to fully expose the buried structure underneath the grassy hump. My recommendation was approved.

In July 2020, with a new excavation mandate and a larger crew, the buried structure was fully exposed. I knew that the only way to fully expose the buried structure within the approved number of excavation units was to find the corners of the brick walls and the

other walls. Typically an archaeological excavation is a controlled excavation, removing a 10cm layer of soil within a 1m by 1m square at a time, and documenting and collected all artifacts found *in-situ*. The artifacts would be analyzed so that an inference could be made as to the function and date of the site.



In this case, most of the artifacts are the numerous brick fragments and miscellaneous metal items from the rubble. These artifacts have no value in determining the context of HS 73184 and were discarded, but artifacts that had distinctive and identifiable properties as to their function and origin were collected, which may provide some sort of inference to the

purpose of the buried structure. Another factor is that it is not clear whether the rubble is related to the buried structure, or whether it was brought from someplace else. The focus of the excavation is to fully expose the buried structure, which is the biggest artifact at the site.

The buried structure has four brick walls with an overall dimension of about 6m by 6m square, and a height of 1m. The rear wall was bowing inwards, most likely due to the weight of the rubble. There were cement footings with wooden forms still attached, and wooden planks on the floor. Water was reached at the floor, but in a couple of weeks the water was completely drained. This further confirms that the water was slope run-off.

There was a central ziggurat-like or stepped brick channel about 5m in length, stretching from the concrete channel to the rear wall, with metal grates across it. The central brick channel and the metal grates gave the impression that it was a *furnace*, and not a platform for a boiler. No large amounts or a stockpile of coal were identified, which would have indicated the type of fuel that was used for the furnace.

No indication of an entrance or roof was found on the buried structure, so it is not known how people would have entered or exited the structure, or whether it had an overhead shelter. It is also not known whether the brick walls were much higher or whether the rubble, most of which was composed of brick, was once part of the wall.

Another question is: why was HS 73184 buried? All of the other buildings in the vicinity were simply abandoned. I wonder whether this had to do with the construction of Grassy Mountain Road, and whether the furnace predates it? The furnace is at the bottom of the Grassy Mountain Road embankment, and there is the possibility that the furnace was buried when the road and the embankment were constructed. The furnace may have sat above ground, and the road embankment built up the landscape around it, which ended up burying it. At this point, no historical photos of the area around Grassy Mountain Road have been found.

The ziggurat-like brick channel was composed of stamped firebricks, the same types used to construct the Bernard-style coke ovens in the historical town of Lille. No bricks lined the floor of the ziggurat brick channel which was stamped earth. This led me to consider whether the furnace was a coke oven, but it would have been a small one with a confined space, compared to the much larger and numerous coke ovens in Lille. Also, why just one, why at this scale, and why at this locale? And there are no large amounts of coal identified.

I asked a local historian to visit HS 73184 and hopefully give me another lead, and Fred Bradley did just that. He walked around the furnace and proclaimed it could be a "rail bending kiln," and that there was a reconstructed rail bending kiln at the Crowsnest Museum. Also, there was a bent rail found sitting on top of the furnace, but it was unclear whether it belonged to the

furnace or part of the rubble. The rail bending kiln would heat and bend rails as part of its annealing process and shape them into a "U" and installed them as structural arch supports for underground mine walls and ceilings.

I examined the reconstructed kiln at the Crowsnest Museum and noted similarities, mainly the metal grates, the firebrick construction, and a concrete capstone. A concrete capstone was also found in the rubble of the furnace. There are similarities between the reconstructed kiln with HS 73184, but not enough to be conclusive. The Museum's reconstructed kiln is above ground, has an outlet to connect to a blower at the rear, a few small outlets along its length, and a larger outlet at its front. Whereas, my furnace was found below the ground, with no observable outlets along the length of the brick channel, no outlet to connect to a blower, and its main outlet is connected to a concrete channel. Also, the cribbing of the reconstructed kiln is a flush wall, whereas the brick channel is constructed in a stepped-like or ziggurat-like fashion. Though there are similarities, there are differences as well. Not enough to say conclusively that my furnace was for bending rails.

Inquiries were made to various colleagues, museums, and mining associations throughout Canada, the USA, and the UK who specialize in mining heritage. The replies I have received so far were not fruitful and has garnered some interest as to the furnace's uniqueness. All of the respondents stated that they had never

heard of a rail bending kiln and question whether such an annealing process would strengthen a brittle rail to make it as a viable mine support compared to wood. Also, they noted that if wood was easily available then a rail bending kiln would not make economic sense. I'm beginning to wonder what the reasoning was behind the rail bending process which occurred in Alberta. Was this an attempt to develop a new mining technology?

Ian McKenzie, another local historian, forwarded me a 1920 map from the Geological Survey of Canada which showed two structures in the vicinity of the furnace before the presence of Grassy Mountain Road. This added to the inference that the furnace predates the road, but once again, it is not conclusive, *if* one of the structures on the map is the furnace.

The end of the excavation has uncovered a mystery and a lot of questions. A lead, but nothing conclusive. It was with hope that time and additional inquiries will help to solve this mystery in the future.

On May 2021, with a different archaeology mandate, I re-examined the furnace with fresh eyes and mind, and I noticed that a small portion of the excavation wall to the west that was upholding the brick wall had collapsed. Shovel testing in previous years found rubble in that direction, and the 2020 excavation exposed a concentration of rubble in that wall. The collapse exposed another brick wall of another structure. There was more to the grassy hump than the furnace.

The crew and I removed the sod and uncovered a round brick wall about 4m in diameter, giving the impression that it was a *kiln*. My shovel tests in the previous years had been excavated around the walls, but they never landed on the wall. We couldn't dig further into the kiln until we had a mandate from the government to do so, but I suspected it was one metre in depth, matching the depth of the furnace. Why was there a kiln abutted to the furnace? It was not even connected to the furnace itself. Is it an actual kiln? What was its function? The plan forward was to get a government mandate to uncover the kiln, and to determine its function and relationship to the furnace.



That was the plan, until weeks afterwards when the Grassy Mountain Coal Project application was denied and archaeological work on the site was halted. For safety reasons, in October 2021 the furnace and the kiln were carefully reburied for future archaeologists to uncover, and hopefully solve the mystery of HS 73184, the furnace, and the newly designated HS 107606, the kiln.

All photos by Tommy Ng, Bison Historical Services Ltd

## Red Finns in the Pass

by Ian McKenzie

The role of Finns in the labour history of Crowsnest Pass is poorly documented, but indications are that they were influential beyond their numbers. The Finn population was limited here - the 1911 census records only 23 adult Finns in Coleman, 11 in Bellevue (5 or 6 others were killed in the 1910 mine explosion), 4 in Passburg, 2 in Frank, and 4 west of Coleman. Yet there were Finnish Halls in both Bushtown (East Coleman) and Bellevue, each dating to about 1910 and neither of which exist today.

The Bellevue hall was a sizeable two-storey structure located at the northeast corner of today's 211 Street and 24 Avenue. The location of the Coleman/Bushtown hall is unsure - a 1980 historical building inventory claims it was the Karl Waalholm residence located on the now-vacant lot at the corner of today's 81 Street and 15 Avenue, but tax roll information suggests it was at today's 81 Street and 13 Avenue, a triangular lot now with a trailer at the start of York Creek Road.

Both halls were centres of Finn social, cultural, and political activities, but were also used by other groups, and in Bellevue movies were shown there prior to the construction of the first theatre. In oral history interviews, Evan Gushul recalls attending music and Ukrainian classes in the Bushtown Finnish hall as a child, around 1920-1925, and says that Ukrainian and Polish residents used the hall as well. It is

probable that the opening of the nearby Ukrainian and Polish halls in 1927 led to the decline of the Bushtown Finnish hall which was eventually demolished.



The Finnish Workers Hall in Bellevue. ca 1910.  
Photo: Provincial Archives of Alberta A11542



A 1918 photo of the same Hall, showing what is probably an enclosed staircase added to the front of the building.  
Photo: Crowsnest Museum & Archives, 0095 Gushul Neg

Many Finnish immigrants brought strong socialist tendencies from home, and were

motivated towards creating a better life in Canada through social change.



The Karl Waalholm residence, East Coleman/Bushtown. 1980 photo from Provincial Historical Resources Inventory Site Form HS22899, Alberta Community Development

A brief biography of a Pass Finn comes from historian and ethnographer Varpu Lindstrom in her paper *Martta Laitinen's Story*. Martta Laitinen was interviewed in Russia in 1988, when she was 93 years old. Martta and her first husband Pekka Lehto were fervent socialists who were on the losing side of Finland's civil war between Whites and Reds in 1918, so decided to come to Canada in 1923. Lindstrom says, in part:

*Pekka . . . had found work in a lumber camp in British Columbia, but he was restless and had heard that the Alberta miners were "raking in the dollars." He moved to Blairmore, Alberta in 1925 and Martta followed a few months later. Since Blairmore was a mining town and there simply was no work for women, Martta was unemployed for the next six years. These years gave Martta an opportunity for great personal growth and self education. She became a political activist and joined the Finnish Organization of Canada (FOC), a left wing*

*political and cultural group. She participated in plays, helped organize miners' unions, marched in rallies, and collected funds for labour causes.*

*By July 20, 1926, the Finnish women of Blairmore, Alberta, were sufficiently organized to found a Finnish local of the Women's Labour League (WLL). Martta was elected its first chairperson and later served as its secretary, as correspondent to the radical Finnish American women's newspaper, the Toveritar, and as leader for the Young Pioneers. The culmination of her literary efforts occurred when she received \$18 for a short story based on the Civil War in Finland which was published in two consecutive issues of the Toveritar. All other work she did as an activist and an organizer was entirely voluntary. Her best friend, Anna Apponen, gave Martta and other socialist women activists valuable English lessons, trained them in public speaking and in conducting meetings. Ill health often forced Anna to give her lessons from her sickbed. Martta also recalls, with great respect, the efforts of Mary North, an untiring organizer. Together the women published a handwritten newspaper Koli-Nyrkki (a Fist of Coal) and did their best to spread other Canadian radical newspapers.*

...

*Five Finns went even further in their radical activities and officially formed a local of the Communist Party of Canada. They were Pekka and Martta Lehto, Arthur and Anna Apponen and Mary North. By the late twenties, the work at the mines was cut to three days a week and then even further. By 1930 Blairmore was feeling the economic*

consequences of the depression and the earlier enthusiasm and hope of the workers waned and people started to drift away. Once again the future looked quite bleak.

*But then came some inspiring news. The Soviet Union was looking for good workers to help fulfill the goals of Stalin's five-year plan. The Finnish Canadians were especially welcomed to Soviet Karelia. The people were encouraged to bring their belongings, tools, farming machinery and money. The FOC organized the recruitment effort, took care of the travel arrangements and helped to spread the news of this opportunity to build a vital socialist Finnish-speaking Karelia.*

*Martta and Pekka Lehto and their friends Arthur and Anna Apponen decided to uproot once again. In Karelia, Anna was sure to get good food and free medical help. . . . They packed their cars and drove to Toronto where another hundred Finnish Canadians were ready to move to Soviet Karelia. Pekka and Martta Lehto took only clothing and bedding with them, but others transported cars, furniture, heavy machinery, even pianos. . . .*

In all, perhaps 10,000 North American Finns (about 2500 from Canada) moved to Karelia in the 1930s. The venture began well, but ended in extreme suffering and tragedy due to Stalin's increasing paranoia. Most of the men were shot or died in prisons or work camps, including Pekka who starved to death in Siberia.

According to the 1926 Canadian census, "Matt" and "Martha" Lehto lived in the

house which still stands at 13422-21 Avenue in Blairmore.



April 1, 1919 edition of *Toveritar*

One can find snippets of information on Mary North who, despite her British-sounding name, was a Finnish labour activist with a long and busy history in the Pass. She emigrated from Finland to Canada in 1909 at age 19, and was present at the opening of the Bushtown Finnish hall in 1910. In addition to the activities mentioned in *Martta Laitinen's Story*, Mary North spoke publicly at rallies and meetings, and taught youths about making socialist choices while at school or at church. Some information on her activities during the Pass' famous

1932 strike, when she was age 42, is within Dr. Kyle Franz's *Alberta's Red Democrats: the Challenge and Legacy of Blairmore Communism, 1921-1936*:

*And just when many felt they had seen it all, there came something that shocked even the police. Led by Mrs. Mary North, Miss Angela Roman and Miss Hilda Johnson, a parade made up entirely of children commenced through town. It was estimated that eighty boys and girls made up the parade, and just as in "adult" booing parades they sung popular songs while they were walking, stopping at each marked house to "boo" its occupants. Constable E.B. Butcher, brought in because of the strike, noted that after booing each house in the New Townsite [west Blairmore, owned by West Canadian Collieries] twice, they concentrated their attention on the working-class houses of scabs and their families.*

Mary and her husband John North lived at what is now 13350-16 Avenue in Blairmore, next door to fellow Finns Thomas and Sara Macki (whose backyard sauna is featured in the *Heritage Inventory Project Phase 2* as the "Mackie Log Sauna"). Mary North died in 1941 at the age of fifty after a lingering illness, and is buried in Blairmore's Old Union Cemetery. Her obituary was tactfully silent about her socialist and union activism, although labour politician Enoch Williams spoke at her funeral.

There is undoubtedly much more to the story of Finnish labour activism in the Pass, but there appears to have been no targeted research. Much of the existing literature on

Finns in Canada centres on women, which gives a refreshing gender bias in opposition to that normally found in historic research.

If anyone has more information on Finns in Crowsnest Pass, please send a note to the author via [heritageviews.cnp@gmail.com](mailto:heritageviews.cnp@gmail.com).

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#### Information sources

*Martta Laitinen's Story* by Varpu Lindstrom is in *Canadian Woman Studies*, Vol 10 No 4 (1989). The entire article is well worth reading, and can be found at <https://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/view/11132/10221>

The best source for detailed information on the social and political conditions leading to Blairmore's communist flirtations is *Alberta's Red Democrats: the Challenge and Legacy of Blairmore Communism, 1921-1936*, Kyle Franz's 2013 PhD dissertation.

[https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/bitstream/handle/1974/8231/Franz\\_Kyle\\_R\\_201308\\_PhD.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/bitstream/handle/1974/8231/Franz_Kyle_R_201308_PhD.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

Information on the Women's Labour League is at <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/womens-labour-leagues>

Information on the Finnish newspaper *Toveritar* is at <https://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/history/toveritar/>

Blairmore's historic Mackie Log Sauna is in *Crowsnest And Its People Millennium Edition*, page 472, and in *Heritage Inventory Project Phase 2*, page 57, at <https://www.crowsnestpass.com/public/download/documents/13945>. Insurance maps suggest that the sauna dates from about 1935.

## Oral history Interview

# Grandma Gushul: Q&A with Evan Gushul (1916-2014)

Excerpts from a 2003 Oral History interview by the Kule Folklore Centre, University of Alberta

. . . [I] came home from [mandolin] practice one day, and my grandmother was looking after us as my father and mother were trying to run two studios Coleman and Blairmore and it got a little bit, how shall we say, a little bit tacky. My grandmother was supposed to be looking after us while they were away in Blairmore . . . but this one day when I came home from practice I told my grandmother, I don't know what made me take notice of this violin that we had hung on the wall, I said "I'm going to take that violin down and tune it the same as the mandolin."

*How old were you?*

Oh I would have been about seven or eight then. And you know, she just didn't say anything, just nodded her head so okay if you want to do it, do it, so I pulled the bow over the strings, made a sound, right away she picked up, oh, why don't you try to play this one, and she would hum one of the, I always called them the old country blues tunes . . .

. . . it was very seldom that my father and mother were both home together, you know, because of the studio business. And my grandmother, she had other interests in her life, she used to like to raise chickens,



and to get wheat for the chickens she used to go to the CPR boxcars, when the boxcar was emptied of wheat, and would be brought up to the coal areas to be filled with coal. Well, before they fill it with coal they used to strip the paper out of the cars and everything that they lined them with, uh, everything clean for the wheat. But there was a lot of wheat left over and she would go in there, and I'd make little scrapers for her and she would gather that up and bring sacks of it home. And one time she got into a car, and she didn't realize that the train was moving and she ended up in BC, at Sentinel, oh yes, and they phoned down, one of the guys recognized my grandmother and he says well, and he says I know that if you phone Tony Belevich, that's her son in law, that he'll come and get her. Which they did. Well, he was

the wrong one to phone because he laid the law down to her (laughs), and then they phoned down to my father in Blairmore and he told them that she was up there, my father gave her hell for that and everything, but it didn't stick. Because as soon as they got back to Blairmore she was back in the cars again. Next time she was watching out, soon as she felt the cars moving well she had to jump out. Well the car was moving

just a little faster than she anticipated and she kind of hurt her back and legs, you know, and she didn't go out for quite a while after that. But she jumped out, she wasn't going to go to Crow's Nest again (laughs). But my father was sort of aware that this was going on, but not completely.

One day he looked at our bills, we were dealing with Union Meat Market, Mr. Burtek was operating that, and he notices five dozens of eggs for this one day. He says how come there's all these eggs over here, and grandmother just sort of bewildered she didn't know what to say or anything, but it was marked on the bill that they got you see. Finally she told him what was going on. She was selling eggs out of her barrel that was filled with wheat, she sold these as freshly laid eggs, freshly laid by my chickens.

Well, when she sold all the eggs that the chickens had laid, she was short, people still coming to get eggs, so she sent us kids up to the store to get eggs. This one particular day, that was the day was her undoing, there was, oh, he went back over the bills there was all kinds of eggs bought that way, but my father didn't see anything until that one particular one when there was five on that one day . . . so anyway that put the crimp on her for that . . .

*Did you ever get punished?*

By my grandmother. Well because . . . I can't remember for what, but her standard punishment was you go behind the stove and she would sprinkle some wheat on the floor there, and you go with your bare knees on that wheat and you hold your arms up. . .



Polahna Gushul (1863-1942), date unknown.

Crowsnest Museum and Archives, 6202 Gushul glass neg

## *How old were you?*

I was about four or five years old, six years old, maybe five, I don't know, very young anyway, for something that she didn't like the way I did it, and usually she would do this to both of us to both my sister Nadia and myself, because of something that, I don't remember whether I sassed her back on something, which I don't think I ever did, but she wasn't happy about something, and that was it . . . And my father read the riot act to her one day when he found out about that . . . so she quit that.

*The full content of this Kule Folklore Centre oral history interview is at [https://era-av.library.ualberta.ca/media\\_objects/6395w810d](https://era-av.library.ualberta.ca/media_objects/6395w810d)*



A young Evan Gushul  
Crowsnest Museum and Archives, 8392 Gush neg

## The Century Home Club

Address: 7714 22 Avenue,  
Coleman

Year built: 1906, by Wes Johnson

Features: Two storeys with wraparound front porch. House faced south away from street, overlooking Coleman townsite. District known as Whiteside Hill.

Significant occupants: O. E. S. Whiteside, International Mine manager from 1908 to 1934.



Photo from *Crowsnest Illustrated*, 1908

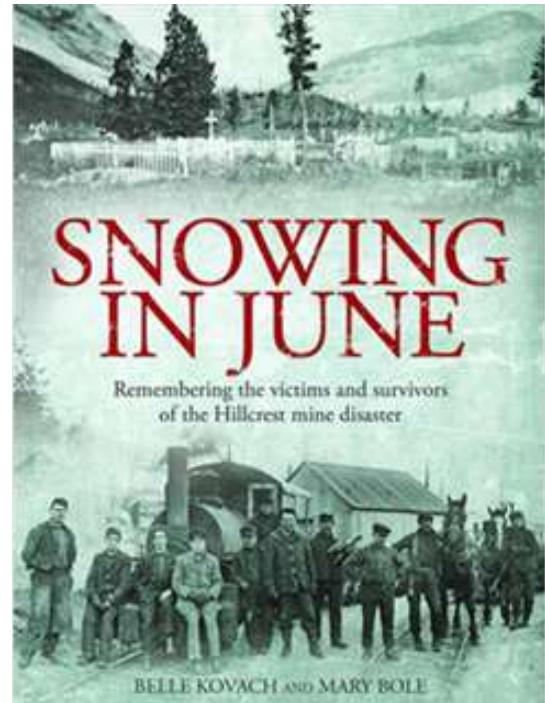
## Book Review

### *Snowing in June* by Belle Kovach and Mary Bole (2014) Review by Ian McKenzie

This is not your average history book. Rather than covering every aspect of the Hillcrest Mine Disaster of 1914, it concentrates on the men who were killed in it. This is fortunate, as *The Devil's Breath* (see issue #63) was published around the same time. Of course, *Snowing in June* includes essential background and disaster information, but then focuses wholly on biographies of each victim. Thus both books can comfortably sit side-by-side on your bookshelf.

The biographies are quite interesting, and often present information never before published. One would expect that these simple coal miners left few traces of their lives, but the authors left no stone unturned. Also presented are never-before-seen photographs of victims and their families. Victims are grouped by ethnicity, an unusual but effective way of sorting the 189 biographies. There is a further section on disaster survivors, who were few enough that they didn't need sorting.

Don't miss reading the Preface regarding the authors' personal motivations for the book, which I found quite touching. As well, the interesting Appendix cleverly uses an actual victim to demonstrate how to build a biography from various types of official records.



*Snowing in June* started out as a website, sort of a private wiki for sorting and storing information (<http://hillcrestminedisaster.com/>), which might explain the absence of an index in the book. Miners are not organized alphabetically, which makes it quite difficult to find a specific person, particularly if you don't know their nationality. I also would have liked a section on those miners who missed being on their shift that day, and thus survived. There are a handful of errors in the background information, which could be explained by the rush to get the book published ahead of the Disaster centennial.

This unique book has no peers on this topic. It is an informative and engaging record of the people killed in Canada's worst mine disaster, but it is also an impressive record of the persistence of two determined and motivated researchers.

## Hillcrest Upper Tipple

Lots of locals go up and see the Hillcrest mine ruins, because it's a short easy walk and the site is justifiably famous as the scene of Canada's worst mine disaster. But not very many people find the old upper tipple foundations.

Each important mine had some sort of tipple for loading coal into rail cars; after cleaning and sorting the coal was "tipped" or dumped into the waiting cars below. The basic designs were similar, but there were variations to make up for local terrain. At Hillcrest, the terrain was a challenge, as the mine was some sixty metres above the rail line! The upper tipple near the mine was connected to the lower tipple near the rail line by a covered "retarder" conveyor belt which was powered by gravity acting on the coal loads, which required a brake or retarder rather than a motor.

Start this short (less than 2km round trip) easy hike at the junction of 230 Street and 7 Avenue in Hillcrest. Follow the gravel road up the hill which skirts the west edge of the mobile home park. On your left you can see a coal slack pile which gives a clue to your destination. Soon you come to a vehicle gate, which can be skirted by cyclists and

pedestrians. About 250m past the gate you come to a major road junction – take a hard left which in a few minutes takes you to Hillcrest's big concrete water tank. On the other side of the tank there are sort of three ways on: one downhill, one uphill, and one straight ahead. Take the middle route. Keep an eye out for the old concrete foundations of the tipple in bushes on your right, no more than 150m from the water tank. If you go too far, you will just come out onto the upper road (the Bear Valley mountain-bike route) which offers another view of the concrete foundations below.



Not much remains of the tipple other than the concrete, but there are some interesting metal bits whose functions can only be guessed at. Please do not disturb these artifacts, so that others may enjoy them too.

Now follow the upper road to the west, and either take the sharp right turn back down towards the way you came up, or make the short detour to the main mine site straight ahead. The major structure there is the powerhouse, in the bushes down to the right of the road, some 500m from the tipple foundations. Further along is the famous hoist house which had to be repaired after the 1914 explosion (one of the 189 victims was killed there).

Please be respectful, as you are on private land. Behave as a guest should.

## News 100 Years Ago

People today remember Emilio Picariello (often spelled Piccariello, or sometimes just Pic or Pick) for the murder of Stephen Lawson – and well they should – but he was also a good citizen, successful businessman, popular politician, generous donor, and a regular guy with a sense of humour. Here are some *Blairmore Enterprise* newspaper excerpts from 1921 and 1922, a century ago:

February 24, 1921:

*At a well attended meeting of citizens held at the Cosmopolitan hotel on Sunday. . . it was decided that Blairmore [should have a] curling club.*

*Managing Committee – J. E. Gillis, G. N. Elwin, L. P. Robert, E. Piccariello, J. P. O'Neill.*

*. . . The meeting opened with a few words of prayer and exhortation from Emperor Pick, and closed with prayer by the honourable chaplain.*

September 15, 1921:

*Emperor Piccariello and Capt. W. A. Beebe hope to set the ball rolling by installing the first cement avenue crossing, between the Alberta hotel and Club Café corners on Fifth Avenue. Will other brothers please follow suit and help on the good work of making our town beautiful and inviting?*

September 22, 1921:

*Following some discussion on the matter, it was on motion unanimously decided to act upon the suggestion of our M.P. and to organize what will be known as the Blairmore Educational Association. . . At this*

*juncture, E. Piccariello, a member of the local town council, came forward with the substantial sum of \$50, stating his pleasure at the formation of such a worthy organization and that if more funds were required to call upon him. A vote of thanks was accorded Mr. Piccariello for his liberality.*

December 22, 1921:

*There is less poverty and dire need in Blairmore than in any other part of this fair province, until Emperor Piccariello comes along with his gifts of flour and macaroni for "those in need." Then most of the people become very poor and tears bedecking their hardened countenances have the desired effect on the good nature of our local Emperor and one-time Prince of Bootleggers. "Pick" is giving away flour and macaroni by the carload to ensure that none will be in want at Christmas time.*



*Blairmore Enterprise, May 25 1922*

March 23 1922:

*Reports of attendances at the local Sunday schools for the year 1921 show that the smallest attendance for the year was on the Sunday of Emperor Pic's picnic.*

May 11 1922:

*Councillor Piccariello informed the council of his intention to erect a large service garage and warehouse, fronting on Victoria Street on three lots immediately west of the Alberta hotel. He stated that the new enterprise would be "a benefit to Canada, a benefit to the Crows' Nest Pass, a benefit to Blairmore, and a benefit to Piccariello," and asked Council if they would grant him tax exemption on the improvements for a period of ten years in consideration of his establishing a labor-giving industry.*

*Councillors Morency and McDonald voiced themselves as favourable to the granting of the request, but as a whole the Mayor and council failed to see that it would be within their power under the towns act to allow such exemption.*

After the dramatic and tragic events of October 1922, Piccariello's name was mentioned in the press in quite a different context. Despite some Pass citizens turning against the accused murderers, the *Blairmore Enterprise* seemed to remain neutral, even sympathetic, to Piccariello and Lossandro, and provided factual (more or less) reporting that was free of emotion or blame.

September 28, 1922:

*Piccariello was not by any means a desperate character. He had often been obliged to carry on his person large sums of money and for his own protection procured a permit to carry a gun. He had probably never intended that the gun should take a*

*human life and it is generally believed that the dastardly act of Thursday evening last was committed on the spur of the moment of excitement following the news of the death or dying condition of his boy.*

## 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.

Picariello, Lossandro, and the Lawson murder are featured on the sign by the Alberta Provincial Police barracks in Coleman.



Have you read it?

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



- **CROWSNEST MUSEUM and ARCHIVES** - 7701 18th Avenue, in Coleman National Historic Site. 403-563-5434, [cnmuseum@shaw.ca](mailto:cnmuseum@shaw.ca), [www.crowsnestmuseum.ca](http://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.



- 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](mailto:cnmuseum@shaw.ca), [www.appbarracks.com](http://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](http://www.bellevuemine.com).



- **FRANK SLIDE INTERPRETIVE CENTRE** - off Hwy 3. 403-562-7388, [www.frankslide.ca](http://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](http://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](http://www.crowsnestheritage.ca)