



Heritage News

Discover Crowsnest Heritage

ISSUE #11

MARCH 15, 2011

WELCOME

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by
Karen Davidson

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A Crowsnest Heritage Initiative Project.

If interested in submitting an article, news piece, or update, please send it to cnheritage@shaw.ca.

March 11th, 2011 is the deadline for tenders to demolish the Maple View Community Hall in Bellevue. Described by the Municipality as "...a 540m², single story, wood frame structure on a concrete foundation," it is much more than that.

Built as an elementary school in 1923, when the villages of Bellevue and Maple Leaf were expanding, Maple Leaf School contained four classrooms, a principal's office and a library. Hundreds of students passed through its doors. Dozens of teachers wrote on its blackboards. Young minds were nurtured, talents blossomed, and lifelong friendships formed.

When the M.D. McEachern elementary school opened in 1962, Maple Leaf School closed and the building became the "Maple View Community Centre." Once again it served as a hub of the community where events were staged, meetings held and Crowsnest families worked and played together.

A fire on March 11th 2003 sealed its fate. Damaged bathrooms and hallways, and the discovery of asbestos in its construction condemned the building. Put up for sale by the Municipality, it appears no potential buyer has been interested in restoration. Another piece of Crowsnest history is about to disappear, so hang onto your memories and old photographs.



Maple Leaf School from Crowsnest and Its People, Millenium Edition page 116.

WHAT'S ON THIS MONTH

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Venues in the Crowsnest open year round:

CROWSNEST MUSEUM, ARCHIVES AND GIFT SHOP

7701-18th Ave. Coleman 403-563-5434

The Museum is now on Facebook-check it out Open Monday to Friday, but please phone or email cnmuseum@shaw.ca to ensure the Museum is open when you wish to visit. Adults \$10, Seniors (65+) \$8, Youth (6-16) \$6, Under 6 free, Families \$24.

FRANK SLIDE INTERPRETIVE CENTRE

Hwy 3 Crowsnest Pass 403-562-7388

The Frank Slide Interpretive Centre is open year round 10:00 am to 5:00 pm Adults \$9, Seniors (65+) \$8, Youth (7-17) \$5, Under 7 free, Families \$22.

LEITCH COLLIERIES

Hwy 3, East end of Crowsnest Pass

Self-guided tour.

The site has interpretive panels, lights for nighttime viewing and washroom facilities. The walking tour takes you past the ruins of the old powerhouse, the mine manager's residence, the coke ovens, the washery and the tippel.

HILLCREST MINE DISASTER AND MEMORIAL CEMETERY

West end of Hillcrest, follow Heritage Driving Route Signs into Hillcrest

Self-guided tour.

The site has interpretive panels. A walking tour takes you past the graves of the miners killed in the Hillcrest Mine Disaster of 1914, Canada's worst coal mining disaster. There is a memorial to all miners killed in coal mining accidents in Canada.

Open close by:

KOOTENAI BROWN PIONEER VILLAGE

1037 Bev McLachlin Dr., Pincher Creek. 403-627-3684

The Museum is open Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays 10:00 am to 4:30 pm.. Adults \$10, Seniors (65+) \$7, Youth (7-17) \$7, Under 7 free.

HEAD-SMASHED-IN BUFFALO JUMP (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

Hwy 785 403-553-2731

Along with its displays the centre has audio-visual presentations, a cafeteria featuring bison burgers, a gift shop filled with First Nations handicrafts, and hosts tour groups and runs educational programs. Open daily 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Contact: info@head-smashed-in.com. Admission: Adults \$9, Seniors (65+) \$8, Youth (7-17) \$5, Under 7 free, Families \$22.

REMINGTON CARRIAGE MUSEUM

Cardston, Alberta 403-653-5139

The Museum has the largest collection of horse-drawn vehicles in North America with over 240 carriages, wagons and sleighs. The 63,000 square foot facility features video displays, a fire hall, a carriage factory, a restoration shop, a working stable, carriage rides, carriage rentals, a restaurant and a gift shop. There are free guided tours. Group tours and educational tours are offered. Open daily 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Contact: info@remingtoncarriagemuseum.com. Admission: Adults \$9, Seniors (65+) \$8, Youth (7-17) \$5, Under 7 free, Families \$22.

WRITING-ON-STONE PARK AND CAMPGROUND

32 km east and 10 km south of Milk River on Hwy 501 403-647-2364

With its mild winters, Writing-on-Stone is a great destination to visit year-round! Hiking trails are clear for most of the year and can be most enjoyable in cooler weather. For inquiries regarding trail conditions or tour schedules please call the information desk at the Visitor Centre (403) 647-2364 ext. 0. Rock-Art Tours: Adults (18 and over) \$8.00; Youth (7-17) \$6.00; Children (under 6) Free; Family (2 parents and their children under 17) \$25.00. Camping all year \$21 - \$27 a night.

GALT MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

502 1st. S., Lethbridge 1-866-320-3898

The Museum is open all year round. Monday to Saturday 10:00 am to 4:30 pm, Sundays and Holidays 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Adults \$5, Seniors (65+) \$4, Youth (7-17) \$3, Under 7 free, Families \$12.

If you happen to be in Calgary:

HERITAGE PARK

1900 Heritage Drive SE., Calgary 403-268-8500

Noteworthy Nights

A three-course dinner in the historic Gunn's Dairy Barn, followed by an intimate, live music performance with some of Canada's finest musicians in the Canmore Opera House. Friday, March 18th Tim Hus and Thursday, April 14th David Francey (SOCAN Folk Music Award and three Juno Awards). Cocktails 6:00 pm, Dinner 6:30 pm, and Concert 8:00 pm. \$89.95+GST. Phone 403-268-8500.

Home-style Breakfast Buffet in the Wainwright Hotel.

Sundays, 9 am-2 pm, January 2nd-April 17th.

Spring Rally in the Alley at the Gasoline Alley Museum

Take your family on a journey back to the 1930s where you'll explore, learn and have a blast! Discover "Scruffy" the run down, binder twine bound Nash car who carried one family on a trek across the prairies to the Okanagan looking for work in the Dirty Thirties. Receive your own map and navigate your way "west" through the museum, discovering the challenges those migrating families faced as you explore Gasoline Alley Museum! Try your hand at overcoming Depression Obstacles on this 1930's car rally course, discover good old fashioned family fun on a shoestring budget and uncover how the rich fared during the "Ten Lost Years". Open daily 9:30 am-4:00 pm

A Taste of History: 5th Annual Fundraising Dinner Saturday, April 2nd, 2011

Commemorating the Repeal of Prohibition in Alberta in 1924

Grand Exhibit Hall- Gasoline Alley Museum 6:00pm. \$175 per person, \$950 per table of 6. Dress: Semi-Formal or Period Costume. To purchase tickets, please contact Kay Parkkari at 403-268-8581. This event sells out quickly, so get your tickets early!

Note: The Historical Village is closed for the Season and will re-open May 21st.

GLENBOW MUSEUM

130 9th Ave. SE, Calgary 403-268-4100

Open Monday to Saturday 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, Sundays 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Adults \$14, Seniors (65+) \$10, Students (with ID) and Youth (7-17) \$9, Under 7 free, Families \$32.

Open year round, the Glenbow has ongoing historical exhibits in its main galleries.

MILITARY MUSEUMS OF CALGARY

4520 Crowchild Trail SW, Calgary 403-974-2850

The largest complex of military museums in western Canada, housing the Naval Museum of Alberta, the Army Museum of Alberta, the Air Force Museum of Alberta, Lord Strathcona's Horse Museum, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Museum and Archives, the King's Own Calgary Regiment Museum, the Calgary Highlanders Regimental Museum and Archives, and the University of Calgary Military Museum Library and Archives. Open Monday to Friday 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Weekends 9:30 am to 4:00 pm. Adults \$10, Seniors (65+) \$5, Students (with ID) and Youth (7-17) \$4, Under 7 free, Families \$20.

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CROWSNEST MUSEUM

7701-18th Ave. Coleman 403-563-5434

Booze and Bars Historical Lecture Series.

The next Booze and Bars event will take place at the Hillcrest Miners' Club in late April or early May. Prepare for an evening of friends, music and historical fun in an important historical venue in the Crowsnest.

HEAD-SMASHED-IN

Hwy 785 403-553-2731

Hike to the Drive Lanes, Wednesday, May 5th.

Join the site archaeologist and Blackfoot guides and walk back in time to when the early plains people hunted the mighty herds of buffalo. Hike to the 5,700 year old drive lanes and other significant locations near the Buffalo Jump. Learn how the Buffalo Runners lured the buffalo towards the jump.

BOMBER COMMAND MUSEUM OF CANADA

1729 21st Ave. (Hwy 2 S) Nanton 403-646-2270

Lancaster Merlin Engine Run-ups:

V-E Day, Sunday, May 8

Seventieth Anniversary of the Lancaster's First Flight, Saturday, June 4

Planes, Trains, and Elevators, Sunday, July 10

Yellow Wings Fly-In, Monday, August 1

Nanton Parade Day, Saturday, August 20

Nanton Lancaster Society 25th Anniversary, Saturday, September 17

Please confirm run-ups and their times by visiting the web site before the event: <http://www.bombercommandmuseum.ca/>

CROWSNEST MUSEUM AND KOOTENAI BROWN PIONEER VILLAGE

7701-18th Ave. Coleman 403-563-5434

Prairies'n Peaks Quilt Festival: Friday, June 10th to Sunday, June 19th.

A juried and invitational show sponsored by the Crowsnest Museum and the Kootenai Brown Museum, including a showing of historic textiles. For more information go

Visit : www.prairienpeaks.com

FEATURE ARTICLE

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An Interview with Rupert Lloyd Thomas, Author of “Goodbye George” by Karen Davidson



Rupert Lloyd Thomas at Fort MacLeod Cemetery where George Willmet is buried.

At just about 2:30 am on Sunday, April 12, 1908, after most of the drunks in Frank, Alberta, had gone to bed, an out-of-work coal miner—trouble through and through—committed a murder so grievous, the case was pursued by many parties for the following four years.

“It’s a helluva story,” says Rupert Lloyd Thomas (RLT), a Toronto history detective, author and blogger who mourns the long-dead victim, Constable George Ernest Willmet.

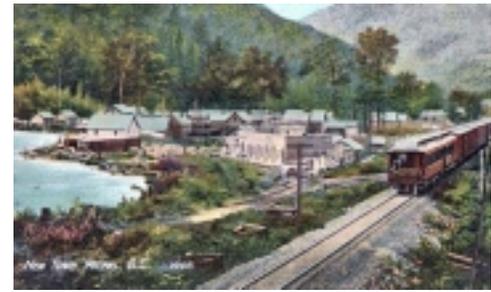
RLT’s research into the Willmet murder started about seven years ago after he moved to Toronto from Lewes, England. “One day I googled ‘Willmet’—an unusual name—and found a story about the first policeman murdered in Alberta. My mother, Stella Willmet, recalled her father talking about the case but assumed it was an ancient family legend. She had no idea it was her father’s first cousin.”

Born into a seafaring family in the English midlands, George Willmet emigrated to Canada in 1907. His family of thirteen siblings had dwindled, and he was one of six remaining brothers. As a new Canadian, he went west to Winnipeg and was recruited into the Royal Northwest Mounted Police even though the money was dreadful and the hours long. He arrived in Frank in the middle of a mine stoppage caused by the Canadian Pacific rail not renewing its contract with the town.

RLT’s tone of voice changes, “Fritz” Eberts, on the other hand, was a conniving man who had a history of trouble back in Germany. Many miners were desperate at the time and there’s no doubt he and others were stealing from the local stores. In the midst of one such attempted break-in, an altercation ensued. In a weird twist, Eberts, the criminal, pursued Willmet, the rookie policeman, into the alley behind the Imperial Hotel in Frank. Willmet crumpled to the ground with a hole blasted through his throat. “It was a senseless, horrid, point blank murder that sucked the life out of its victim in a flash.”

Witnesses later recalled the precise moment they were awakened as Willmet’s life was cut short. RLT explained, “That no one came to his assistance speaks to the rough and tumble nature of frontier life on a Saturday night. Jarring noises were common enough to make folks hunker down.”

After the murder, Eberts managed to outsmart the authorities and elude suspicion for years. In spite of a long-standing \$200 reward, the case went cold until a whisper from a loose-lipped woman in New Michel illuminated what previously had been speculation or misinterpretation.



New Michel 1908. Postcard. Glenbow Archives PA-3048-17

According to RLT, there are many twists and turns in the historical accounts of the hunt for the murderer: the mutilation of a prostitute with an axe; shootings; paranoid police; implausible, incorrect and baited evidence. During the investigation an accomplice was sought but when the authorities refused to communicate with each other, they lost their quarry. Eberts was found to have multiple identities. Finally, the jailbreak of a key witness in Bridger, Montana led to hasty arrests in New Michel, British Columbia. All this took place under the shadow of the gallows at Fort Macleod.

Once arrested, the two bad guys—Mathias Jasbec and Fritz Eberts—pointed fingers at each other. Jasbec confessed to his role in the robbery, but not the murder. The jury sided with Jasbec's testimony and found Eberts guilty. Then, in a last ditch effort to save his skin, Eberts tried to convince another condemned prisoner to take the blame for the crime. Foiled again, Eberts was sentenced to hang in April 1912.

As a descendant of Constable Willmet, RLT's pursuit of what happened was dogged. A century removed, he sought answers the RCMP, the Pinkerton National Detective Agency and the Thiel Detective Service Company missed. In his book he writes, "As I was chasing down the story, it took me a while to realize what a botched job this truly was. It was a mixture of incompetence, complacency and alcohol in about equal measure."

An accomplished storyteller, RLT's well-researched yarn about the mayhem of the hunt and subsequent trial of his ancestor's murderer is riveting and disturbing. He admits, "A single sentence in the book can be the result of seemingly endless searching and puzzling. Along the way I had nightmares that major questions in the case would be lost to history but I managed to track down about 95 per cent of what I hoped to find. Persistence over many years unraveled just about all of it."

At one point Thomas discovered a file in the National Archive in Ottawa misnamed "Willmet", "It was a wild card stem search while perusing the system from home, and I thought, 'I've GOT to make another trip to Ottawa to see that file.' In an instant, I knew I had found things that no other researcher had seen." What he found is momentous to the story, among them some mug shots and a "Wanted" poster in Ukrainian.

On another occasion he was looking for details about the man who brutally slayed Monte Lewis, the notorious Frank prostitute, around the same time of the Willmet murder. A plain brown envelope slipped out of the file onto his lap. "When I picked it up and saw 'Eberts penciled on the front, it was a gasper." Thomas' excitement is palatable as he recalls how he found two photographs of his great uncle's murderer inside.

Nonetheless, he continues, "If there's one thing I'd still like to find out, it's the ultimate fate of Monte Lewis' killer. Eberts was never implicated, but the murderer was a fellow coal miner. He beat the rap on acquittal and disappeared for a time, only to turn up again and kill his wife."

"What drove me to write 'Goodbye George' is that I was angry. Eberts was a hardened criminal and he was given every advantage by the Canadian government that proved to be too weak and slow to move against him. They should have deported him back to Germany. The idea you can kill a policeman and get away with it is absurd."

RLT bemoans the fact that what ultimately became of Eberts brings into question justice at its core. After the trial, Ebert's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. But even that is not the end of the story...

Rupert Lloyd Thomas is a graduate of Durham University in the north of England. He has worked as a bureaucrat, a freelance sports journalist covering motor racing (The Daily Telegraph and the South China Morning Post); and every October hosts a daily talk show on the cult radio station Rocket FM in Sussex England. From his base in Toronto he writes and travels. He is a frequent contributor to Wikipedia. He has driven his smart car down Route 66 from Chicago to Los Angeles.

"Goodbye George" will be his first book. Lloyd Thomas is seeking a publishing partner. Any interested parties please contact him at: rupertlt@sympatico.ca

CROWNSNEST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Crowsnest Historical Society held its annual general meeting (AGM) on Sunday, March 6th, 2011. Five new members were elected to the Board of Directors: Lenny Maclsaac, Henry Bruns (returning after a one-year position), Terry Hrudy, Frank Loseth, and Donna Zwicker. At a Board meeting held on March 8th, 2011 the following officers were elected: John Salus, President; Lenny Maclsaac, Vice-President; Henry Bruns, Treasurer; and Claire Allum/Donna Zwicker, Secretary.



Tom Langford

The AGM was held at the historic Orpheum Theatre in Blairmore, to mark the beginning of heritage celebrations of Blairmore's 100th year municipal anniversary. The guest presenter for the event was Tom Langford, a sociologist from the University of Calgary, who talked about the closure of the mines on the Alberta side of the Crowsnest Pass in the 50s and 60s and its economic, social and political impacts. It was an interesting and highly relevant talk given the strike at Teck Resources Ltd.'s Elkview coal mine, which affects many inhabitants of the Crowsnest Pass today.

CALGARY MILITARY MUSEUMS

At least 277 artifacts were looted from the Calgary Military Museums between August and December of 2010. A man was arrested on January 29th in possession of over \$5000 worth of the stolen property. Unfortunately only 57 items were recovered and approximately 220 items are still missing, some are loans and the rest are donations by the families of surviving war veterans.

Some of the items stolen include rank chevrons, cap badges, collar badges, bayonets, berets, stars, medal sets and Allied victory decorations. The galleries which were robbed include the Army and Air Force Museums of Alberta, the King's Own Calgary Regiment and the Calgary Highlanders.

100 YEARS AGO: 1911

- March 16th: The Mercantile Hall in Blairmore was converted into a Roller Rink. It opened on Monday morning.
- March 19th: International Women's Day is celebrated for the first time. It was originally called International Working Women's Day. Today it is celebrated on March 8th, but its origins go back to 1910 at the second international conference of working women held in Copenhagen. At the meeting, Clara Zetkin, leader of the Women's Office for the Social Democratic Party in Germany, proposed that every year in every country there should be a celebration on the same day of Women's Day to press for various demands made by women. Zetkin's suggestion was unanimously approved and the decision was implemented for the first time on March 19th, 1911. The day was celebrated by over a million people in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, and politicians were pressured by women for the right to vote, to hold public office, and protests were held against employment sex discrimination.
- March 23rd: Coleman is on strike. The miners have been idle since Saturday and refuse to pay their company for water and light.
- March 28th: The four men of the "Lost Patrol" were laid to rest by the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (forerunner of the R.C.M.P.) at Fort McPherson in the Canada's Northwest Territories. The four—Inspector Francis J. Fitzgerald, Constables Richard O. Taylor and George F. Kinney, and their guide, Special Constable Sam Carter had departed on the Police's traditional mid-winter 620 mile endurance trip from Fort McPherson to Dawson City. The group lost its way and ran out of its 30 day rations in January, and died while trying to get back to the Fort. The annual patrol was discontinued after 1921.
- April 11th: An explosion at the Banner Mine of Pratt Consolidated Coal Company, near Littleton, Alabama, killed 128 coal miners. All but five of them were African-Americans who had been convicted of minor crimes and were sentenced to hard labor.
- April: Senator Peter McLaren sells his saw mill and entire holdings at the west end of Blairmore to A.G. Peuehen of Totonto.



National Women's Day USA 1909.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

SUPPORT LOCAL HISTORY BY VOLUNTEERING SOME TIME AT THE CROWNSNEST MUSEUM!

Some volunteer opportunities available include:

- Taking admissions and running the Gift Shop
- Acting as a guide for walking tours and educational programs
- Working with the collection
- Housekeeping and maintenance

Contact Stephanie at the Crowsnest Museum to discuss volunteering some time: 403-563-5434.