



# Heritage News

Discover Crowsnest Heritage

ISSUE #17

September 15, 2011

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**Reconsidering the  
History of Blairmore**

by  
**Kyle Franz**

100 Years Ago  
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**Editor: Claire Allum**  
cnheritage@shaw.ca  
A Crowsnest Heritage Initiative Project.

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

Welcome to the September/October issue of the Crowsnest Heritage Newsletter. This month we have the rare opportunity to celebrate the centennial of one of our old towns, Blairmore. Kyle Franz, who is a guest speaker at the event, has contributed this month's Feature Article, which, unlike our usual contributions, is a personal analysis of the Crowsnest Pass's communist past. I encourage you to read it and not hesitate in introducing yourself to Kyle at the Crowsnest Pass Homecoming events to discuss it with him. One day this centennial celebration will itself become part of Crowsnest Pass's history.

## WHAT'S ON THIS MONTH

### CROWSNEST PASS HOMECOMING: Celebrating Blairmore's Centennial

#### Friday, September 23

5:30 pm – 7:30 pm: Steak Night, Blairmore Legion  
7:00 pm – Midnight: Registration & Social, Albert Stella Arena ( Tickets \$15.00 at Door)  
7:00 pm – Opening Reception: Guest Speaker – Kyle Franz, Blairmore's Red History  
8:00 pm – Midnight: Homecoming Social – Entertainment Gus Kollee and Friends

#### Saturday, September 24

9:00 am - 4:00 pm: **Crowsnest Pass Allied Arts "M.Arty's Market"**, Albert Stella Arena (Free Admission)- Artisan & Entrepreneurial Treasures Fair, Children's Activities, Live Entertainment, Food Concession, Historic Blairmore Fire Engine

10:00 am – 4:00 pm: **Centennial Entertainment Stage** at the Albert Stella Arena (Free Admission)

10:00 am: Monica Field

11:00 am: Beards & Bonnets Contest Judging (Sponsored by Blairmore Lions Club).

Centennial Family Recognition

12:00 Noon: Centennial Cake Cutting

1:00 pm: Sierra Shortreed

2:00 pm: Nancy Kinnear

3:00 pm: Jeff Chambers

10:30 am and 1:30 pm: Guided **Crowsnest Heritage Driving Tour**. Buses depart from Frank Slide Interpretive Centre (Ticket Required). 403-562-7388.

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm: **Ride the NIT Train** at NIT Commemorative Plaza (13442-21st Ave.)

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm: Guided **Blairmore Historic Walking Tours** (Meet at the Blairmore Band Stand)

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm: Guided **Blairmore Cemetery Tour** (Meet at Catholic Cemetery)

6:00 pm – 2:00 am: **HARVEST OF MEMORIES • DINNER & DANCE• Crowsnest Sports Complex • Feature Entertainer: Mike Maguire Live with special guest Kelly Cytko** (Contact Crowsnest Museum for Ticket Availability).

#### Sunday, September 25

8:00 am – 11:00 am: Homecoming Breakfast, Albert Stella Arena (Event Ticket Required)

**Activities Throughout the Weekend**

10:00 am – 4:00 pm: Crowsnest Museum: Special Blairmore Centennial and School Exhibit for Homecoming  
 10:00 am – 4:00 pm: Bellevue Underground Mine: Tours Every Hour, 403-564-4700 to book tickets  
 10:00 am – 5:00 pm: Frank Slide Interpretive Centre

**TASTE OF CROWSNEST PASS**

Throughout the weekend the following restaurants will feature special dishes to celebrate our community's ethnic and cultural diversity:

- Bamboo Restaurant (Japanese) 403-753-2223  
12337 – 20th Ave. Blairmore
- Chris' Restaurant 403-563-3093  
7802- 17th Ave. Coleman
- Highwood Restaurant (East Indian) 403-562-8888  
11373 – 20th Ave. Blairmore

- Popiel's Restaurant (Polish, German) 403-563-5555  
Highway 3, Coleman
- River Ridge Family Restaurant (Chinese) 403-562-2252  
13609 – 20th Ave. Blairmore
- Side Trax Diner (German) 403-562-8228  
11366 – 20th Ave. Blairmore
- Stone's Throw (English) 403-562-2230  
13019 – 20th Ave. Blairmore
- Vito's (Italian, Greek) 403-564-4522  
8505 – 20th Ave. Coleman

Check out [www.crowsnestheritage.ca](http://www.crowsnestheritage.ca) for further information or updates



**THE CROWSNEST MUSEUM**

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

**Open Monday - Friday.** Open year round. Along with its displays and archives, it hosts a Gift Shop and runs tours and educational programs. Contact: [cnmuseum@shaw.ca](mailto:cnmuseum@shaw.ca). Adults \$10, Seniors (65+) \$8, Youth (6-16) \$6, Under 6 free, **Families \$24.**



**THE FRANK SLIDE INTERPRETIVE CENTRE**

Hwy 3 Crowsnest Pass 403-562-7388

The Frank Slide Interpretive Centre is open year round 10 am to 5 pm (9 am to 6 pm July 1st until Labour Day). Adults \$10, Seniors (65+) \$8, Youth (7-17) \$5, Under 7 free, Families \$22.



**HEAD-SMASHED-IN (UNESCO World Heritage Site)**

Hwy 785 403-553-2731

**Alberta Art Days: Sept. 30th, Oct. 1st and 2nd.**

first Nations People demonstrate and display their artistic skills and products during this special weekend. Listen to First Nation entertainers and watch spectacular dance demonstrations. This event will also feature Kids Crafting Workshop, Alberta birds of Prey on Display, door prizes and special presentations. *Free Admission.*

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](mailto:info@head-smashed-in.com). Admission: Adults \$10, Seniors (65+) \$8, Youth (7-17) \$5, Under 7 free, Families \$22.

*Galt*  
**MUSEUM & ARCHIVES**  
*stories unfolding...*

Quiet, respectable Lethbridge where everyone is polite and well behaved? Well... not always... experience Lethbridge history in a different light!

**CEMETERY tours**  
*bring a flashlight and dress warmly!*  
**by flashlight**

Fri SEP 30, OCT 07\*  
 Sat OCT 01, 08\*  
 Thu OCT 20\*  
 Mon OCT 24\*

Tours at 9 and 10 pm nightly  
 \* also 8pm tours on these dates

\$5|\$4\* TICKETS AT THE GALT MUSEUM STORE on sale SEP 01  
 \* annual pass holder rate

[www.galtmuseum.com](http://www.galtmuseum.com) 403.320-3954

west end of 5 Ave S off Scenic Dr. Lethbridge | parking access from 4 Ave S | [info@galtmuseum.com](mailto:info@galtmuseum.com)

*Galt*  
**MUSEUM & ARCHIVES**  
*stories unfolding...*

**GALT MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES**

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.

**FERNIE MUSEUM**  
 Until October 7th 2011.  
 Art Exhibit by Fernie Artist Laura Nelson.

*Taking Root*  
 A Celebration of the Tree

An Exhibition of New Works  
 by Fernie Artist *Laura Nelson*

Opening Reception  
 Saturday, September 3rd 7 p.m.  
 @ Fernie Museum Gallery

on display until October 7th 2011 - 491 2nd Ave-UPSTAIRS

[lauranelson.ca](http://lauranelson.ca) [info@lauranelson.ca](mailto:info@lauranelson.ca)



## GLENBOW MUSEUM

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

**Cut: Costume and the Cinema.** *August 20th to September 28th.*

On view for the first time in Canada, this exhibition reveals the integral role of costume design in creating unforgettable screen characters. "When actors put on those clothes that is when the character comes alive," says Nancy Lawson exhibition co-curator. More than 30 actors are represented from some 25 films which depict five centuries of history, drama and comedy. Some of the films represented include a refreshing take on the classic Cinderella fairy tale (Angela Houston *Ever After*); seventeenth century Virginia (Colin Farrell, *The New World*); the eighteenth-century England of the aristocracy (Keira Knightley and Ralph Fiennes, *The Duchess*); the first voyage in the Pirates adventure trilogy (Johnny Depp, *The Pirates of the Caribbean; Curse of the Black Pearl*); the fantastic and opulent nineteenth-century Paris (Emmy Rossum, *The Phantom of the Opera*) the story of Peter Pan (Kate Winslet, *Finding Neverland*) and the new adventures of Sherlock Holmes (Robert Downey, Jr. and Jude Law *Sherlock Holmes*).



## 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](mailto:info@remingtoncarriagemuseum.com). Admission: Adults \$10, 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. 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.

## FEATURE ARTICLE

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### Reconsidering the History of Blairmore

**Kyle R. Franz, Queens University**

In my experience, anniversaries are much like weddings, funerals and family reunions: a good chance to get together with family and friends, have a few drinks, share a few laughs and remember times gone by. As we prepare this September to celebrate Blairmore's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is an excellent opportunity as historians (and history buffs, too!) not only to share those memories, but to reflect upon the way that we transform memories into histories.

While re-reading my well-worn copy of *The Story of Blairmore, 1911-1961*, I was struck by just how dated much of this book has become.<sup>1</sup> In reality, it now stands as much a testament to cold war perspectives and politics as it is a registrar of Blairmoreites' shared histories and experiences. The words of Willem De Kooning come to mind: "The past does not influence me. I influence it."

I draw an example from one of the most contentious periods in Blairmore's colourful history: the election and re-election of Communists to Blairmore's town council and school board during the 1930s. For the uninitiated, Mayor Knight and his colleagues served three consecutive terms in office, undertaking an agenda that pragmatically sought to address Blairmore's depression-era realities while promoting radical social and political changes both within the town's municipal boundaries and beyond. Though contentious, it would be historically inaccurate to say their election happened because of voter apathy; the municipal elections of 1933 boasted a 90% voter turnout.<sup>2</sup>

Although best remembered for declaring a public holiday to celebrate the anniversary of the Russian Revolution and re-naming the town's main street "Tim Buck Boulevard" to honour the then-imprisoned leader of the Communist Party of Canada, the Reds also undertook a fundamental overhaul of the way life was lived at Blairmore. Within weeks of taking office, the cost of property tax and town-owned light

and water utilities was lowered for all workers within the town's boundaries. Library fees were abolished and the local arena was purchased by the town to make sure that all residents could make use of it. Vacant land was made available for residents to plant vegetable gardens, and rather than selling property that had accumulated due to tax default under previous administrations the new council opted to renovate buildings in order to house those who could not afford to house themselves. Those on relief received an increase in pay from twenty cents per hour to fifty cents per hour for work completed, the highest rate of pay for relief work in the country. Pedigree dogs were taxed as symbols of frivolity and excess during a time of crisis. The council even went so far as to decree that charges of prostitution would not be pursued within town limits, requiring local women of the night to carry with them a medical certificate stating they had a clean bill of health. The administration was in the process of purchasing the local hospital and attempting to institute a program of public healthcare when it lost power in 1936.

And for those of you putting your trash out this week, it might interest you to know that garbage collection started in Blairmore under the watchful eye of Mayor Knight and his colleagues.

Regardless of whether you find the events described above to be inspiring, enraging or some combination of the two, the reality is that they occurred. It is also a reality that at this time both the federal and provincial government were actively prosecuting known Communists. Those who were not Canadian citizens (for example, landed immigrants) faced deportation, and those who were citizens faced lengthy stays in federal prison.<sup>3</sup>

This is where facts and histories begin to diverge.

When Blairmore celebrated its golden anniversary in 1961, citizens found themselves long-removed from the days when dabbling in Communism could be socially justified. The iron curtain had descended, the atrocities of Joseph Stalin had been revealed, and the hunger and desperation of the Great Depression had given way to post-war prosperity in Canada. Added to this was the onset of McCarthyism and the frightening reality that another world war could seemingly happen at any time. One has only to consider the rapid escalation of the Cuban Missile Crisis (or for that matter listen to one's child talk about air raid practice at school) to understand the gravity of the situation at hand. In this context, Communism and the Soviet Union were inextricably associated, and almost universally decried.

This lived reality left the historians of Blairmore in a rather awkward position. While for many the 30s represented the triumph of the human spirit over hunger and economic chaos, it had been achieved under an unapologetically Red administration. But to say Communism had become taboo would be an understatement. Perhaps well-known Blairmoreite Anne Spatuk put it best when she spoke with the CBC in 1986: "...you didn't tell people you were from Blairmore. There was a kind of inbuilt reaction to Blairmore, a connotation with "Redism" and Communism and all aspects of it."<sup>4</sup> On a personal level I can remember my own Grandpa complaining about the "Goddam Communists in Goddam Blairmore."<sup>5</sup> And that was the language he thought appropriate with which to describe Blairmore to a four year old boy.

Not surprisingly, historians 50 years ago chose their words carefully. Avoiding any description of the council's actions or accomplishments, *The Story of Blairmore* attributes the rise of Communism to Reds being "just plainly hungry and bored."<sup>6</sup> And while there was discussion of the sometimes rowdy and always well-attended meetings, this was as much a comment on contemporary voter apathy as it was a testament to the council's arguably populist legislative agenda. The demise of the council was equally simple to explain; it wasn't a massive realignment of global economies, the onset of war or a reconsideration of political perspectives that caused Communism to disappear at Blairmore, it was sport. "There were teams organized in hockey, baseball and basketball and by Father Harrington fortnightly entertainments at the then Columbus Hall. People, young and old, got together and once more relations were friendly and happy."<sup>7</sup>

Though glossed over in *The Story of Blairmore*, at least the Red administration warranted a mention. In the first edition of *Crowsnest and its People* there was no record of Communists or Canada's first and most notorious Communist town council at all. And while this is perhaps not surprising given the social context of the publication, it did not escape the attention of unabashed Communist and former Mayor of Frank Tony Pitera. Always outspoken, Pitera proclaimed that: "Its not in *that* history book...'fraid they don't want young people to know about that history of Communism!"<sup>8</sup>

Operating without the benefit of hindsight thus far exercised in this article, I would like to make the following assertion: It's time to take Tony up on his unspoken challenge. It's time to talk about Blairmore's Communist past, learn from it, and reintegrate it into our understanding of what it meant to grow up in the Pass.

Given the consequences one faced being a Communist during the 30s, I would suggest that not only is Blairmore unique in that it is the only place in Canada where Communists were not prosecuted, but more importantly the residents here took a real and calculated risk voting for Communists, supporting Red candidates and most importantly standing for election. I would argue that this wasn't something that could nonchalantly be attributed to such broad characteristics as boredom or hunger, rather it represents a real level of agency and determination on the part of Blairmoreites to make their individual, familial and civic realities better not only for themselves, but for their neighbours as well.

Whether you agree with me, disagree with me or want to share what you know about Blairmore during the 30s, please come talk to me during the centennial celebrations this month. Or better yet, challenge the perceptions of what you know around camp fires, kitchen tables or pitchers of beer as you come together to celebrate this milestone in Crowsnest history. History is an ever-changing perception of the past, and you hold the key to how it will be interpreted in the future.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Blairmore Lions Club, *The Story of Blairmore, 1991-1961* (Lethbridge: The Lethbridge Herald, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> W. Bartlett, "William Knight Chief Magistrate," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 16 February, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> For example individuals who were Red in their sympathies were both prosecuted and deported from Bienfait, Saskatchewan after miners there went on strike. Photographic evidence contained within the Gushul Collection at the Crowsnest Museum demonstrates that the miners of the Pass were well aware of this reality, carrying banners that read "remember Bienfait!" during Labour Day parades and other union-sanctioned activities. For more on Bienfait, see Stephen Endicott, *Bienfait: The Saskatchewan Miners' Struggle of 1931* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Anne Spatuk, Interviewed by Allan Able, "Rocky Mountain Reds," on *The Journal*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, September 26, 1986.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Franz Sr. (Bobbie) of Coleman.

<sup>6</sup> Blairmore Lions Club, 64.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Pitera, Interviewed by Allan Able, "Rocky Mountain Reds," on *The Journal*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, September 26, 1986.

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*Kyle Franz is originally from the Crowsnest Pass. Today he is at Queens University researching the history of his home town.*

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## 100 YEARS AGO: 1911

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■ **September 29th.** Blairmore, AB, is granted patent as a town.

■ **October 10th.** Honourable Francis Cochrane is appointed Minister of Railways and Canals.

■ **1911** Emilio Picariello and his family arrive in Fernie, BC.

■ **1911** Waterton Lakes National Park is established in southern Alberta.

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