



# Heritage News

## Discover Crowsnest Heritage

ISSUE #24

April 25th, 2012

### WELCOME

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**Frank Survivor Stories**  
 contributed by  
**Monica Field**

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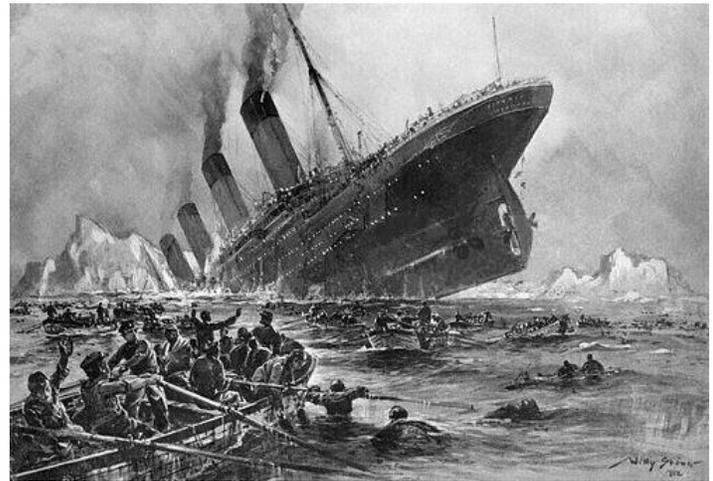
#### THE CROWSNEST CONNECTION.

Major Arthur Godfrey Peuchen, who oversaw the operations of the McLaren Lumber Company, located near Blairmore, Alberta, was a survivor of the sinking of the *Titanic*. He boarded the *Titanic* at Southampton as a first class passenger (ticket number 113786, £30 10s), and occupied cabin C-104.

He was the only Canadian to testify at the US Senate Inquiry into the disaster. Later, his own behavior in a *Titanic* lifeboat was questioned publically in *The Toronto Mail*, leading to accusations of cowardice. These were not substantiated and he was

eventually promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel in the Queen's Own Rifles and awarded the Officer's Long Service Decoration

In 1987, a salvage team recovered Peuchen's wallet from the debris field surrounding the wreck and in it was found his calling card, a traveler's cheque and some street-car tickets.



April 15th 1912. The sinking of the Titanic. Engraving by Willy Stower. Wikimedia Commons.

**Editor: Claire Allum**  
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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.

### WHAT'S ON

#### THE CROWSNEST MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

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



As well as exhibits on coal mining in the Crowsnest Pass, there are galleries on Pass life in the early 1900s, natural history, the military and on Emperor Pic and rum-running, and a gift shop. The Museum is run by volunteers. Please phone for hours that the Museum is open.

#### BOMBER COMMAND OF CANADA

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



Lancaster Merlin Engine Run-ups

- *Sunday, May 6th Salute to the Air Cadets*

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

## THE FRANK SLIDE 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 \$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



Along with its displays, the interpretive 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.

**HIKE TO THE DRIVE LANES: First Saturday of each month, May through October.**

11 am - 3 pm. Bring a lunch. Phone to book. Blackfoot guides will lead these hikes.  
May 5th, June 2nd, July 7th, August 4th, September 1st and October 6th.

## FORT WHOOP-UP NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Lethbridge, off Whoop-Up Drive. 403-329-0444



The Fort is open weekends from 12 - 4 pm. Admission: Adults \$7, Seniors (65+) \$6, Students \$5, Under 5 Free. The Fort has a great gift whop filled with cowboy hats, jewelry, Blackfoot crafts and books. They will ship.

## REMINGTON CARRIAGE MUSEUM

623 Main St. Cardston. 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 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. Contact: [info@remingtoncarriagemuseum.com](mailto:info@remingtoncarriagemuseum.com). Admission: Adults \$10, Seniors (65+) \$8, Youth (7-17) \$5, Under 7 free, Families \$22.

## KOOTENAI BROWN MUSEUM

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



Summer staffing positions

The Pincher Creek & District Historical Society is looking for staff for the following positions at Kootenai Brown Pioneer Village in Pincher Creek, AB:

- Gardening/landscaping
- Tourist Information

Exhibit Development & Maintenance

Positions available from May 14 to August 24, 2012. Closing date for applications April 23, 2012. Successful applicants will be cross-trained for all positions.

Interests in history, museum work, tourism, gardening, special event preparation and excellent people skills are a definite asset. Forward resume to Kootenai Brown Pioneer Village Box 1226, 1037 Bev McLachlin Drive, Pincher Creek or email resume to [tglen.kbpv@gmail.com](mailto:tglen.kbpv@gmail.com).

Most positions are for returning students only. We thank all that apply but only those selected for interviews will be contacted.

More information available on the web site.

## FERNIE MUSEUM

491 Victoria Ave. (2nd St.). 250-423-7016



**The Power of Powder - Tracing Fernie's Ski Heritage: January 28th - April 30th.**

This special exhibit was put together to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ski hill. The story of the ski hill has become an important part of Fernie's story. It's had a huge impact on the economic, social and cultural aspects of this community. You don't want to miss this exhibit which takes up both floors of the museum. Powder Highway Productions has produced a short film based on the narrative, photos, and old film footage collected for the exhibit. This is a fun and entertaining way to experience the story.

The Fernie Museum & Visitor Information Centre is located in one of Fernie's distinctive heritage buildings at 491 2nd Ave. The building itself, an important example of Fernie's rich history, boasts a main floor exhibit hall with the visitor info centre, as well as a lovely Museum Gallery on the 2nd floor. Public washrooms are available on each floor. Our dual service as info centre and Museum allows visitors to discover a little about Fernie's colourful past while learning what Fernie and its businesses have to offer for recreation, entertainment, shopping, accommodation and services.

## Frank Survivor Stories?

Compiled by **Monica Field**

**Mrs. Alfreda Saunders (born Watkins)** remembered that her father had been one of the men trapped in the mine. She, her brothers and sisters, and her mother escaped from the ruin of their home. "It sounded just like a big wind storm and we still don't know exactly how we ever got out alive. It all happened so quickly. I remember a man started to call to us and we walked through the slide towards his voice. We got out, but we never did find out who that man was who saved us. I suffered shoulder and leg injuries, and my mother was in hospital for three months. The rest of my brothers and sisters got out without injury. The river had been blocked by the slide and by the time we reached safety, we had to wade waist deep in water." In fact, it was Gold Creek that had been engulfed by the slide, and stood as a barrier between Alfreda's house and the rest of town.



Frank Slide 1911. Canada Dept. of Mines and Technical Surveys Collection. Library and Archives of Canada c-022991

Eighty-four years after the slide, **Gladys Verquin (born Ennis)** was interviewed. She was only 15 months old at the time of the slide, and was living in Bellevue, Washington at the time of the interview. About the myth of Frankie Slide she said, "It's not true. Our whole family survived the slide. My father told us that our house was reduced to rubble and that we were all pinned under it. Once he had freed himself, he dug around for my mother, my sister, Hazel, brothers Delbert and Arthur and me. Apparently we were all covered with slime and mud and stuff. As soon as he had freed my mother, he groped around in the mud, found me and pulled me out. My mouth and eyes were full of mud. He cleaned them out as best he could and handed me to my mother, pointed at a crack of light and told her to walk towards it. The rest of the kids were old enough to follow on their own behind us. He didn't tell mother at the time, but he was sure I was dead. As mother was walking over the rocks toward the light she stumbled and fell. I made a sound and she knew I was alive. I remember dad telling us about Uncle Jim finding a woman (Mrs. John Watkins) pinned under burning boards. Apparently whenever her husband was down in the mine, she'd sleep with a lantern on in the bedroom. Dad said when they found the boy (the Watkins' 14 year-old son) there was a piece of wood stuck deep in his stomach. They pulled it out. He was in shock and he walked by himself to the light beyond the rocks. They say his stomach had feathers in it (*this was actually Lester Johnson, not Thomas Watkins*). Dad's feet were all full of nail holes, mother had a broken collar bone and we all had scratches, bruises and cuts but we all survived."

Later on in life, **Lester Johnson** wrote down his experiences, and a copy of this memoir was given to Frank Anderson by Lester's wife in 1960. "He recorded that he remembered nothing until he awoke to find himself lying between 'two enormous boulders which had crashed together over him, both pinning him and sheltering him.' Though there was a heavy mask of dust in the air he could see that day was breaking and that fires were burning a short distance from him. He tried to crawl out of his shelter, only to find that a piece of lath had been driven into his side. When it caught on the rocks, the pain caused him to faint. When he became conscious again, it was broad daylight and through the opening in the rocks he could see Sam Ennis and some other men digging in what he took to be the ruins of the Leitch house. He managed to break off the lath and crawl out of his hole. Seeing that his own house was shouldering, and sensing from its condition that his parents were dead inside, he acted instinctively by heading for the

home of his closest friends, the Williams family in Frank. He waded through Gold Creek and walked painfully up a side street of Frank to the Williams home. Somehow, he had lost his sleepers, so that he was stark naked, but no one seemed to notice. On his arrival at the home of his friends, no one took note of his nakedness or the hole in his side. All attention was focused on the incredible sight of the mass of rocks lying across the valley and the steady stream of boulders that were still bounding down the scarred slope of Turtle Mountain. There was talk of men still buried inside the mine ... When he finally mentioned his condition, Mrs. Williams sprang into action, examining him and clucking her tongue at the sight of feathers covering the wound. Apparently the lath had pieced a feather tick or pillow before lodging in his side. He was bundled into warm blankets and trundled in an iron wheelbarrow – the only conveyance available – over the prairie to the little hospital ward beside Dr. Malcolmson's office. There the doctor plucked feathers from him, like a chicken, and bandaged his wound. Physically and emotionally exhausted, Lester Johnson fell fast asleep before Dr. Malcolmson finished the task.”



East part of Frank 1911. Geological Survey. Library and Archives of Canada PA-045405.

**Jessie Leitch** wrote about her experiences in the Winnipeg Free Press: Falling asleep on that quiet, moonlit night, I awoke to the sound of a rumbling roar transcending description. It filled the valley, as Turtle Mountain up-ended, rumbled, and thundered downward. The entire

northern face of the mountain slipped from its pinnacle, and spreading, fan-like, roared for more than two miles across the valley. It crushed silent houses with their sleeping inmates, splintering, smashing and destroying, like a released current. Its fury spent, the avalanche filled the valley with rocks.

Within minutes of that first great roar, lamps were lighted in homes that had escaped, and men and women, half-clad, stumbled to their doors, to find the entire formation of the valley changed. The steep, sheer wall of Turtle Mountain no longer dominated the scene. The craggy peak, that on brightest days had plunged the town into an unnatural twilight, was gone. Masses of loose rock thundered down the slopes, and when the gray light of dawn appeared, the air was full of white limestone dust. The little creek in front of the row of miners' cottages on the street where we lived had disappeared, buried under rocks.

After the mighty roar that woke me in the bed I shared with my younger sister Rosemary, with much rattling and tinkling as of broken glass, a terrific weight came down on us and I could not move. I tried to speak to my sister, but wet coal dust trickled into my mouth. My arm was pinned across my chest, but I could move my hand, which was near my mouth – enough to hold off the coal dust. Some cool air stirred near us, smelling strongly of coal gas. I learned, later, that the head of our iron bed came down across us, like a rack, shielding our bodies and faces.



Postcard View of the Frank Slide. C1930. University of Alberta PC003672.

I doubt if I lost consciousness. I was vaguely aware that some dreadful tragedy had happened, and I prayed for help. It seemed a long time till we could feel someone walking above us, as if on a board, or plank. It pressed into my head and one leg, but it came, and went.

Led by Mr. Stewart and Mr. MacPhail, a rescue party reached the site, as far as they could judge, where the Alex Leitch home had stood. They worked above us, with pick and shovel, calling members of the family by name, lifting great beams and broken timbers. Someone heard a baby crying nearby, and found the infant daughter of the family lying on a pile of debris, partly sheltered by the angle of a broken roof. She appeared to be unhurt, but terrified. She was taken to the home of a kindly German family.

Finally, the terrible weight above us was lifted, and it was broad daylight. Someone held a tin cup to my lips and a kindly voice said, "Try to drink this." I recognized Mr. Stewart's voice, and tried to drink, but I choked. It was whiskey and water. I remember being embarrassed when lifted from the wreckage, clad in a pink flannelette nightgown. My sister and I, wrapped in blankets, were put on a mattress in a buckboard, and drawn by a skinny horse across town to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Trelle. We were not injured.

We were overjoyed to find on arrival in the warm, crowded kitchen that our baby sister was already there, being rocked by a kindly stranger. Almost everyone in the room was weeping. Herman Trelle, a soft-hearted boy whom we knew, came in with a stranger, who told us our parents and four small brothers were dead. Our uncle from Cranbrook was on his way, he told us, to take us back with him.

Someone helped us to dress in unfamiliar clothing, and helped us out to the door to meet our uncle. He had come, with a railway official, on a railway engine, as there was no train. He came up the steep path with arms outstretched, and when he clasped us in his arms his face was wet with tears. We all wept together.

Kindly hands helped the three young survivors of the slide on board. Blankets were spread over the seats, and pillows as well. The crew members, unaccustomed to passengers, did their best to make us comfortable as the train went haltingly across the rock-strewn valley. Finally, the train made more speed and we traveled through a country of tall evergreen trees.

It was midnight when we reached Fernie and our tall cousins were waiting for us. Reflections from coke-oven fires slashed across the sky and George explained them to us. We were not hungry, so quickly left the all-night lunch room in the railway yards and were tucked into berths with green-swaying curtains, on a train for Cranbrook.

It was daylight when we reached Cranbrook, where Archie, another cousin, waited for us with a horse and buggy. He drove us up another hill and past a race-track, to the house where every lamp was lit, and a well-loved aunt stood at the gate with a white shawl for the baby.

The air was soft, and smelled of Balm of Gilead. The sun came up and made darts of light on the wide green lawn surrounded by tall evergreens. And here, the remnants of a family that had known love and happiness together, found kindly affection and help to face an unknown road.

Our loved ones had gone on to a land of perpetual light, "Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

Seventy years after the slide, **Hulda Bansemer, (Mrs. Brown)**, recalls that she had not reached her eighth birthday when their house was hit by the slide. "We had learned to live with the sound of tremendous winds there where they blew through the funnel of the Crowsnest Pass, but all of us, my mother and six brothers and sisters, knew that this was no wind. It was just after four in the morning. All of us had awakened the second it began. I remember my mother calling to us, "Cover your heads, children, cover your heads!" I remember the roar, the deafening roar. I still feel a terror in my stomach when it comes to my mind."

"God simply didn't have a place for us that awful morning," Hulda believes. "When I awoke to that roar I was sure in my heart that the town would be torn to pieces, but the main part of Frank, the school, the church, the bank, was not touched. Our own escape was a kind of miracle. Inside the house, still in our beds, we felt only a sort of lurch, though we found later that the slide had pushed the house 16 or 18 feet and one of the lean-to bedrooms was hanging right on the edge of the creek embankment. Not one of us seven children or our mother had so much as a scratch. All we lost was a hand washing-machine that had been outside and a line of laundered clothes."

Hulda's mother, Annie, was "a rock" for the family. "When the light of dawn came she began packing the boxes and crates that we'd brought from Nova Scotia. Each of us seven children put our nighties and tooth-brushes into overnight bags and we all hiked to Blairmore, two miles to the west, which had become the refuge for the survivors. It was more than 12 hours later when my father and two older brothers came back from the ranch property. They had been told that the whole of Frank had been wiped out. They'd taken lanterns and walked over the slide, but they knew we were safe when they saw that mother had packed us. When my father at last found us he wept openly. It became a family story that I had turned to my mother and asked, 'Why is Dad crying? He wasn't even in the slide.'"

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**Monica Field** is the Director of the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre, a local historian and resident of the Crowsnest Pass.

## HEAD-SMASHED-IN (UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE)

Hwy 785 403-553-2731



### HIKE TO THE DRIVE LANES: First Saturday of each month, May through October.

11 am - 3 pm. Bring a lunch. Phone to book. Blackfoot guides will lead these hikes.  
May 5th, June 2nd, July 7th, August 4th, September 1st and October 6th.

## CROWSNEST PASS DOORS OPEN AND HERITAGE FESTIVAL



### Thursday August 2nd to Monday August 6th.

The festival has been extended by one day this year to accommodate new activities and celebrations. Keep this time open to volunteer and/or attend the many heritage activities that will be offered during the festival.

## BOMBER COMMAND OF CANADA



- Sunday, May 6th Salute to the Air Cadets
- Saturday, June 2nd Planes, Trains and Elevators
- Saturday, July 28th Joe English Memorial Fly-by
- Saturday, August 18th, The Calgary Mosquito

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

Lancaster Merlin Engine Run-ups.

May 6th, June 7th, July 7th, August 6th, August 18th and September 22nd.

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

# 100 YEARS AGO

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- April 18th. Blairmore Board of Trade passed a resolution asking the provincial government to assist the people of Frank in moving from the danger zone of Turtle Mountain. Blairmore Enterprise.
- April 25th. 1,000 Barrels of Cement Per Day: the Rocky Mountain Cement Co. Making Great Effort to Meet the Growing Demand fro Their Product. When the new machine is in place the capacity will have increased from 400 to 1000 barrels of cement per day. Blairmore Enterprise.
- April 26th. Born: A. E. van Vogt, Canadian-born science fiction writer (d. 2000).
- May 2nd. Blairmore has Good Baker. J. Holloway has added a large delivery wagon to his business which he says is increasing more rapidly than he had anticipated. Blairmore Enterprise.
- May 3rd. The 59 unidentified bodies recovered from the *Titanic*, by the *CS Mackay-Bennett*, were buried at three cemeteries in Halifax.
- May 9th. Fire Swoops Down Upon Peaceful Sleeper. Early on Monday morning, there was a fire at Albert Manastak's house in Slav town at the west end of Coleman. There was no water connection so people used pails of water fetched from the river. Two other houses burned. Blairmore Enterprise.
- May 13th. Born: Gil Evans, Canadian jazz composer, as Ian Ernest Gilmore Green, in Toronto (d. 1988)
- May 16th. Brisco's Blairmore. Headquarters for Summer Underwear: Balbriggan Underwear 50¢, Merino Underwear 75¢, Cashmere Underwear \$1.00. Panama Hats \$2.50 up. Have a special Panama, guaranteed to stand rain and cleaning. Price \$2.50. Blairmore Enterprise.

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