Historical Journey through

WILD Alberta

YOUR ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND
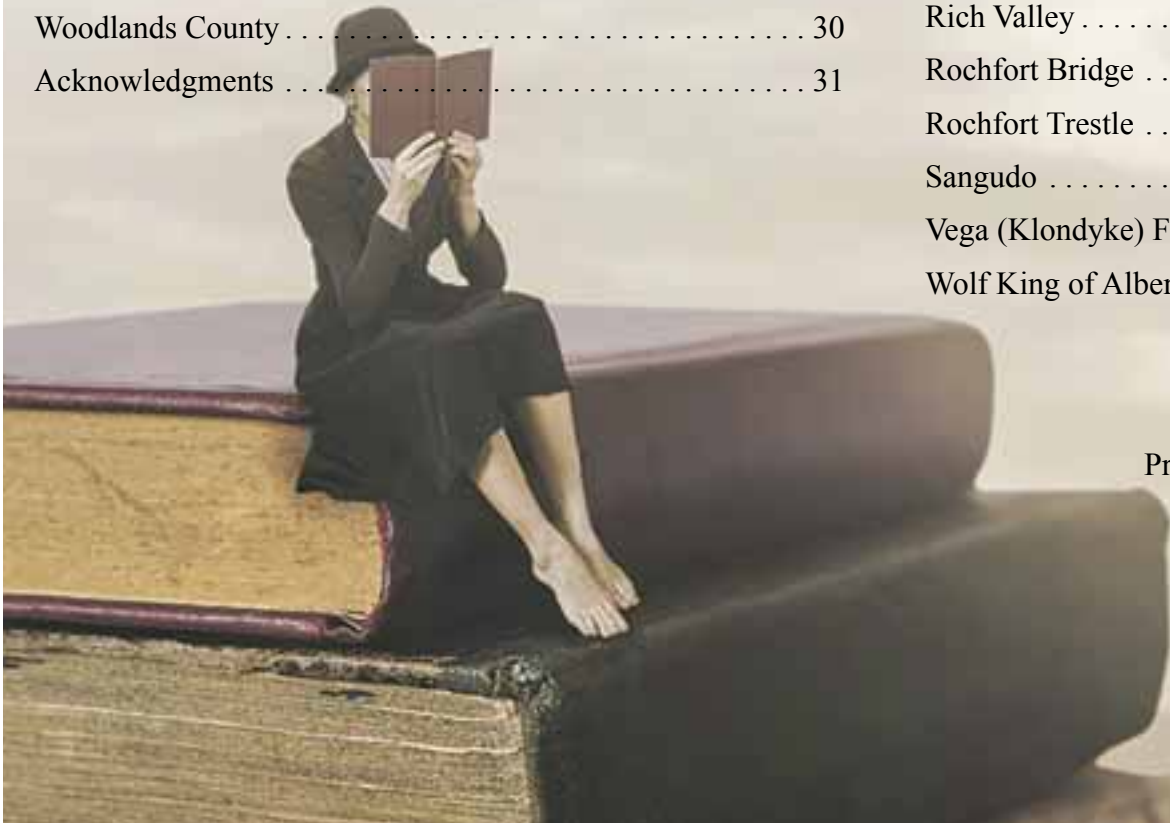
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Alexander First Nation

The Alexander First Nation thanks Wild Alberta, for the opportunity to be included as part of its member communities histories. Alexander First Nation's history finds its recorded starting point earlier than the member communities, and speaks to the importance of relationship building and maintaining relationships.

1750

Generally, the historic records note that the Cree (Strongwoods Cree) and Assiniboine People (Swampy Ground Stone or Assiniboine) were known to this region circa 1750, living a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle. By the time early fur traders began to establish their presence in the region, the ancestors of Alexander First Nation knew how to survive, traverse and portage through the region and beyond, through the networks of rivers, lakes, and streams as well as through a vast overland trail network. Much of the travels of Alexander First Nation's ancestors is documented in various archival records, most notably between the North Saskatchewan and Athabasca Rivers.

The ancestors of Alexander First Nation were also certainly familiar with what became later known as the Express Trail, first used by the North West Company and later the Hudson's Bay Company, which included the Athabasca River between Jasper and Fort Assiniboine, and the overland route between the Athabasca Landing and Fort Edmonton, then over water again on the North Saskatchewan River heading east all the way to York Factory.

1790: Peter Pangman

Alexander First Nation ancestors were documented in the comprehensive history book by WGP Allen. The Cree hunting party that Peter Pangman met in 1790 near present day Rocky Mountain House, were Woods Cree ancestors of the Alexander First Nation.

1799: David Thompson

It's common knowledge that David Thompson is most famous for his contributions to transforming and expanding the fur trade in the west of what we currently call Canada. During his time with the North West Company, he gathered information about Native peoples which is of significance to Alexander First Nation.

Thompson's departure from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in 1797 to join the North West Company (NWC) led to his encounters with Alexander First Nation's Woods Cree ancestors (and possibly Swampy Ground Stone or Assiniboine ancestors and Iroquois ancestors too) during a time when Thompson, "saw the transitional Parklands (aptly termed "Hills and Plains, Forests and Meadows"), with their bluffs of poplar and aspen interspersed with tall grasses." During these years, he travelled and traded, "on the northwestern fringes of the NWC's sphere, working along the upper Athabasca and Saskatchewan River, 1798-1802, where the goal of the NWC was to map a path to "push the fur trade west across the Continental Divide." Where he found Swampy Ground Stone Indians were trading at Lac La Biche. While Alexander First Nation's Iroquois ancestors were migrating west to hunt on the Plains.

After Thompson had spent the winter of 1798-99 at Lac La Biche (where he met Swampy Ground Stone Indians trading there), he left in March 1799 to go to Fort Augustus I (Fort Edmonton), at the time, located above the mouth of the Sturgeon River where it met the North Saskatchewan River. According to Kalyna Country, "he stayed for two weeks. In one of his journals he memorably described the first Edmonton House, operated at the same site by the HBC, as being a "musket shot away" from the NWC post."

Kalyna Country adds, "On 19 April he headed west with 3 horses and 5 men to the Pembina River, following it north to the Athabasca River, taking a side trip to Lesser Slave Lake, and then travelling east via Fort-of-the-Forks (latter-day Ft. McMurray) to Île-à-la Crosse on the Churchill River in what is now north-western Saskatchewan." Further, Alexander First Nation's ancestors had actively participated in the fur trade at Jasper and Fort Assiniboine by the early 1800s, and by 1868, were known to the fur traders at Lac La Nonne. In 1880,

3 years after Chief Catchistahwayskum (later known as Chief Alexander) signed adhesion to Treaty No. 6, his reserve was located at its present location.

In 1798 Thompson travelled through the English (upper Churchill) River department up the Beaver River (Sask.) to Red Deers Lake (Lac la Biche, Alta), where he established a trading post and spent the winter. In early spring he travelled overland to Fort Augustus (Fort Saskatchewan) and from there he investigated a new route from the North Saskatchewan River to the upper part of the Athabasca River by way of Lac la Nonne and the Pembina River. He then followed the Athabasca River to the Clearwater River (Sask.), from which point he took the usual route over Methyee Portage down to Grand Portage.

1911

Based on the writings of WGP Allen.
In 1911, during the annual pilgrimage to Lac Ste. Anne, a group of Cree joined the wagons of Father Lacombe and some priests on the trail west from Edmonton. The party stopped at Deadman Lake, where they spotted the deserted Klondike trail.

After stopping the convoy and making preparations for a meal, everyone was summoned for a ceremony. A Cree chief emerged in full war regalia, chanting in his native tongue. The chief went over to a dead willow bush and removed a stem, continuing his chant as members of his tribe joined in unison. He then walked to the middle of the trail, holding his wooden wand, and pointed first to the south, then the north, followed by east and west. He then broke the wand in two and dropped it on the trail. Everyone fell silent. Father Lacombe spoke with them in Cree before turning to the others and saying, "This was the Indian ceremony that closed the trail through their reserve; the last segment of the old trail through the Pembina Valley."

The land was changing; new roads and the railway had started to bring the trail into obscurity. After a prayer, the group dispersed and continued on to Sandy Lake. They set up camp - in the exact spot where Northwest Company

trader Peter Pangman traded with the Cree in 1790 - and lit the council fire. These fires, which Father Lacombe had been attending for decades, were formerly the venue where the decisions that governed the land were made, where stories were told, alliances forged, and plans laid out.

Lacombe told the group of his encounters with David Thompson, who had lost an Indigenous companion on the trailhead near Deadman Lake in 1799. In his view, as an Indigenous person had fallen at the opening of the trail, it was only right for one of their brethren to close it forever.

The Father had some other news as well: Fort Edmonton was slated for dismantling; its day had come and a new way of life was upon the country. For the trails, which had seen a steady stream of feet for thousands of years, it was the end of an era of eras.

Westlock, 1913, 1916, 1947

While Westlock was being established as a village and later as a town, the Canadian government's pass system had been well established.

Alexander First Nation's ancestors were among those recorded as groups of First Nations known in the area around Westlock.   To the south of Westlock is an old Indian trail.

Barrhead, 1906

Barrhead's connection to the Grizzly Trail is well known as it follows the original Klondike Trail and known to have opened the way for settlement in the Peace River region. In 1810, Alexander First Nation ancestors allowed David Thompson to explore their old trails system in the area connecting the North Saskatchewan River with the Athabasca Pass.

All through this region, Alexander First Nation's ancestors were known to have been hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering and harvesting; living a traditional lifestyle.

Swan Hills, 1967

The Town of Swan Hills, is located along now forgotten historic trails, including the Grizzly Trail used by the ancestors of Alexander First Nation to trade at Lesser Slave Lake.

Whitecourt, 1910

Information on the Whitecourt Web (whitecourtweb.com/seniors/history1.htm) largely aligns with Alexander First Nation historic information about Whitecourt (where the rivers meet) located along the Athabasca River, the area where we find Whitecourt today, is known to historically been inhabited by the Beaver peoples, who were forced out of the area prior to the 1780s by the Cree (Strongwoods Cree) and Assiniboine (Swampy Ground Assiniboine, part of the Yantonai Dakota Sioux, also known as the Stoney Assiniboine peoples) peoples. The Whitecourt Web also notes that the Beaver peoples entered into a peace treaty with the Cree/Stonies in 1872 at a place called Peace Point.

To add context in relation to Alexander First Nation, Alexander First Nation's ancestors are documented in the famous Palliser Expedition manuscripts in 1859 when the explorers documented a Stoney Assiniboine camp a few miles east of the junction of the McLeod and Athabasca Rivers. By this time, the Strongwoods Cree and the Swampy Ground Assiniboines were already sharing the territory.

The historic trail systems in the (area we now call) the Whitecourt area, are also documented near Sangudo and Carson Lake that the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation refers to as the Nakota Trail of 1877". Alexander First Nation and Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation have shared Swampy Ground Assiniboine ancestry.

Fox Creek

Iosegun Lake (North of Fox Creek), Little Smoke Lake (West of Fox Creek), is known in the oral history in Alexander First Nation. According to Barry Mustus and Laura Golebiowski,

The, "well-worked Indian path between Lac Ste. Anne and Whitecourt" was used by some keen prospectors traveling north to the Yukon, in advance of the construction of the renowned Klondike Trail. An archaeological report from the 1980s notes that another pre-contact trail ran from Whitecourt to McLeod Lake before branching in two directions: one

northwest to Iosegun Lake, and the second eastward to Lesser Slave Lake. This trail was later used by the Canadian Forest Service. Early Whitecourt homesteaders recall a group of Indigenous peoples who still lived at McLeod Lake, known locally as the "McLeod Lake Indians." "Names such as Evan Cardinal, Ben Bisma, Pete Pennystone, Eli and Mitchell Paul, and Louis Moostas will be remembered by many early settlers. The Desjarlais family was also part of the McLeod Lake band, descendants now live in Mayerthorpe."

From the names above, at least one family from Alexander First Nation has ancestry with the Desjarlais family.

Fort Assiniboine, 1823, 1958

The Alexander First Nation has a strong connection to the hamlet of Fort Assiniboine dating back to the early days of the fur trade, and later the Klondike Trail. It's known that the name of Fort Assiniboine got its name from the Assiniboine people, and more specifically, the Swampy Ground Assiniboine; to which some of the ancestors of the Alexander First Nation known to belong to. And many famous people who were known to have passed through Fort Assiniboine in the early fur trade days after the fort was established in 1823, were known to Alexander First Nation's ancestors as well such as:

David Thompson, John Rowand, Sir George Simpson, Paul Kane, Father Pierre-Jean de Set, Robert Rundle and so on.

Barry Mustus and Carson Pegasus
Allen says that,

The most important of all the Northwesters in the discovery and opening of the trail through the Pembina Valley was David Thompson. It was he who put the pieces together that Peter Pangman had found some ten years previously. As surveyor for the North West Company, it was his responsibility to seek out good beaver meadows, find easy routes to them, and map the routes that the brigade masters could travel to and through any area with practically the same assurance as if they had been the discoverer.

In the year 1799, Thompson's task was to travel from Lac la Biche to the Saskatchewan, and from there to the Pembina, the river that Peter Pangman had been told about by the Indians, and by so doing, attempt to find a good route for Angus Shaw's new post that was being built on Lesser Slave Lake. By the time Thompson arrived at Shaw's post, a full season's fur would be on hand, because Shaw had built the post the previous fall.

Indians had told the Northwesters of great land that lay to the west of Lesser Slave Lake, and although Thompson had never seen the lake, he reasoned that there must be a canoe route between it and the river that Alexander Mackenzie had travelled on his way to the Pacific Ocean six years previously. For the present, his task was to get to the Lesser Slave Lake and find a route that would keep Angus Shaw away from both the Methey Portage and the Beaver River. You will recall that Thompson had travelled the Beaver River the previous fall on his way from Ile-a-la-Crosse to Lac la Biche.

Thompson will enter our story quite often, and we shall deal with events at times that are far removed from the Pembina Valley, but it is these events that ultimately lead up to proving the important part that this trail played in the opening of the west --- not only for the North West Company, but in later years, for the Hudson's Bay Company, after the union of the two.

When the spring thaw started to melt the snow, Thompson made preparations for his spring and summer explorations. During the previous winter, a Cree guide had come to the post, and from him, Thompson learned much about the country that he was to visit. It seemed that this Indian knew all about the Pembina River and the lake that Thompson wanted to visit. This guide had also travelled the Athabasca River. Thompson hired the Indian and gave him credentials to be presented at Fort Augustus when the snows became soft and the spring melt swelled the rivers.

In the middle of March, 1799, Thompson left his post at Lac la Biche and travelled overland on horseback to Augustus I on the Saskatchewan. Thompson spent two weeks at Augustus; one week in a survey up the Saskatchewan, and the other outfitting his brigade for the trip. Thompson ascended the Saskatchewan to the wooded areas to ascertain the extent of firewood that was available for the post and also to locate a site away from the Northwester's competitor, the Hudson's Bay Company, whose post was within the compound that they had built together. On the trip, he found an excellent site on the north bank of the river twenty miles closer to the supply of wood, and the post could be defended much easier. Augustus I had been raided two or three times by the Gros Venture during its short existence, and also it was impossible to make any kind of move without the English Company knowing just what was taking place.

The Northwesters seemed to have no fear of the Indians, and the Indians knew this. For this reason, the Northwesters were comparatively safe; however, the English Company did not fare so well. Their men had been attacked quite often when away from the post. As protection against raids, the posts were built on the north side of the river, so that any raiding party could be seen crossing the river.

Allen goes on to say,

As soon as Thompson returned from the upper Saskatchewan, he dispatched a guide and canoe builder to make the frame of a canoe and await his arrival on the Pembina. Now, this statement, which is taken from Thompson's own Journal, definitely shows that he had given the guide and canoe builder instructions to follow the same trail that he would take a few days later. This also confirms the existence of a trail that had been there for many years.

Thompson took four other men and his Indian guide and proceeded up the Sturgeon on horseback. He made an extensive survey of territory as far west as Noys Crossing and placed this survey on his map in great detail. At Noys Crossing, the trail turned north to Sandy Lake, and he came to the Indian village that Pangman had visited years before. Thompson did not tarry long, however, as he was surveying and not trading. He crossed the first Heighth of land and descended to Deadman's Lake, and here, his survey instruments told him that he was on the 114th Parallel, which we now know as the 5th Meridian. More important than this to Thompson was the fact that he was able to prove Pangman's statement that he was on the heighth of land. It was the heighth of land that divided Rupert's Land from free territory, and this is what concerned the Northwesters. To Thompson, this was a point of great importance, and to verify the heighth of land, Thompson must have travelled as far west as Lac la Nonne, because there is a lake resembling it on his map, which he names Manitou Lake. The Indian Wise Men maintain that he did travel in that direction, and later retraced his steps to Deadman's Lake.

Thompson then resumed his trip on the Indian trail leading to the Pembina, passing to the west of Lake George, then along the west shore of Newton Lake and down a small brook to the Pembina River, which was very close to present day Lunnford. It was now the 21st day of April, and the frame of the canoe that his advance party had built was ready for their arrival with the bark that they had brought from Augustus. The canoe was soon ready for launching, and on April 25th, they were at the mouth of the Pembina. April 26th found him on the Lesser Slave River, which he ascended to Shaw's new post. Thompson surveyed the lake at its eastern end, mapped the new route for Shaw's brigade, and descended the river to the Athabasca. He then ascended the Athabasca to a point where he could see the mountains. Descending the river, he surveyed the site of a future post at the junction of the McLeod and Athabasca Rivers, and another at the mouth of the Pembina, which was later built. The remains of this post were still visible in 1910, particularly parts of the chimney. Thompson then descended the Athabasca to the Clearwater, where a new post had been built to replace Peter Pond's first post.

Following in their Footsteps: The Nakota Trail of 1877

Settlers on trail 60 miles north of Edmonton, Alberta.
Photograph taken by Carl Engler, 1910.
Source: Library and Archives Canada.

Written by: Barry Mustus (Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation) and Laura Golebiowski (Aboriginal Consultation Adviser)

Like many Albertans, I have spent a considerable portion of the last year outdoors. I have become better acquainted with my neighbourhood and city parks, and have spent most weekends hiking, camping or cross-country skiing in the mountains. I am grateful to be in a position (both in terms of privilege and location) to access the diverse and beautiful outdoor spaces that our province provides.

When you recreate outdoors, do you consider whose traditional territory you are on? Do you think about those who walked these trails and enjoyed these landscapes before you?

Barry Mustus does. An Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation member currently based in Whitecourt, Barry has dedicated numerous years to the research and reidentification of a historic Indigenous trail network which extended from Lac Ste. Anne north to Whitecourt and beyond. To date, Barry's work has focused on a 30 km stretch of trail from the Hamlet of Blue Ridge, southeast of the Town of Whitecourt, to Carson-Pegasus Provincial Park. Referring to the trail as, "The Nakota Trail of 1877" (the year Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation signed an adhesion to Treaty 6), Barry's efforts strive to demonstrate how Nakota peoples have shaped, and continue to shape, this region of what is now Alberta.

The Stoney people, also referred to as the Assiniboine, have long occupied this area. In 1859, James Hector, a companion of Captain John Palliser, noted a group of Stoney camping at the confluence of the McLeod and Athabasca Rivers, where present-day Whitecourt is located. Earlier still, fur trader Alexander Henry makes mention of a Stoney presence in the Upper Athabasca in 1808. Today, Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation is the most northwestern representative of the Siouan language family and has four reserves: the largest at Glenevis near Wakamne (Lac Ste. Anne) with three satellite reserves at Cardinal River, Elk River and Whitecourt.

Europeans began to arrive in the region in the 1820s, spurred by the fur trade, gold rush and later, the lumber industry. Many of these settlers benefitted from Indigenous occupation in and knowledge of the area. The, "well-worked Indian path between Lac Ste. Anne and Whitecourt" was used by some keen prospectors traveling north to the Yukon, in advance of the construction of the renowned Klondike Trail. An archaeological report from the 1980s notes that another pre-contact trail ran from Whitecourt to McLeod Lake before branching in two directions: one northwest to Iosegun Lake, and the second eastward to Lesser Slave Lake. This trail was later used by the Canadian Forest Service. Early Whitecourt homesteaders recall a group of Indigenous peoples who still lived at McLeod Lake, known locally as the "McLeod Lake Indians." "Names such as Evan Cardinal, Ben Bisma, Pete Pennystone, Eli and Mitchell Paul, and Louis Moostas will be remembered by many early settlers. The Desjarlais family was also part of the McLeod Lake band, descendants now live in Mayerthorpe."

In addition to his research interest, Barry is also intimately connected with this landscape. The Louis Moostas named above is his paternal great-grandfather. In the 1940s, Barry's grandparents Sam and Alice Mustooch raised their children on the long spit of land that nearly bisects the lake. The winters were spent trapping and the summers were spent hunting. Twice a year, the family would travel the old trail by wagon to visit relatives and friends at the reserve at Lac Ste. Anne.

Snippets of stories about the historic trails, and the Indigenous peoples who created and maintained them, exist in local history books. Rarely were the stories shared in these books told by Indigenous peoples themselves. Although the language is dated and often problematic, these written recollections corroborate oral tradition and provide a compelling snapshot of early relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the region:

"…A band of Indians used to go back and forth between McLeod Lake and Lac Ste. Anne several times a year. This band had a stopping place on the flat of the Baxter homestead, leaving their tent poles there year round. Steam baths were apparently part of the ritual of their spring stopover… Circles of stones were
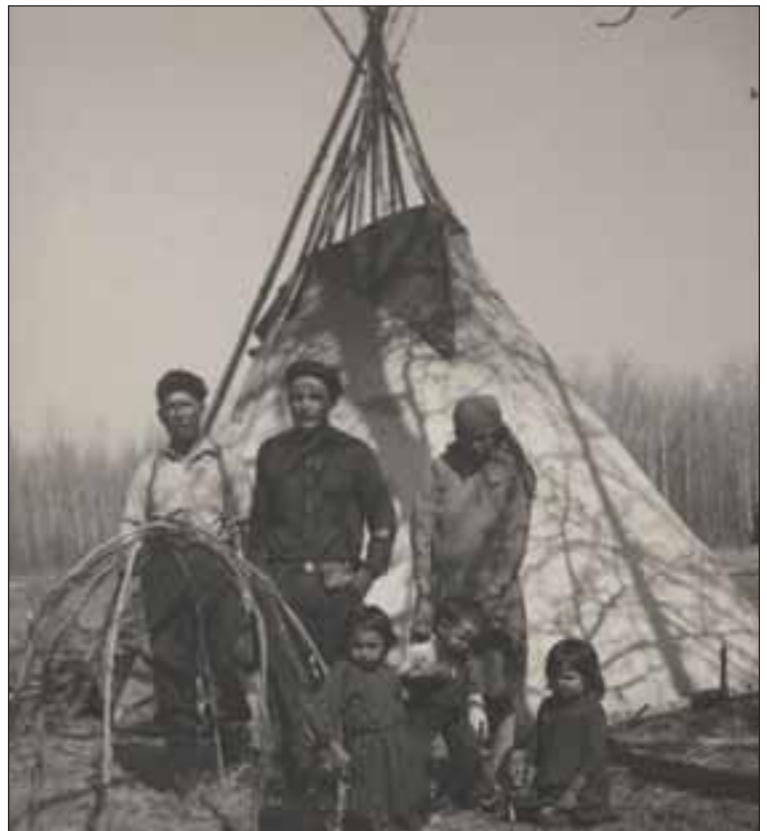
Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation Family, Peter Alexis and Wife, Lac Ste Anne.
Unknown photographer or date. Source: Library and Archives Canada.

heated and a bower created over the stones with willow branches and skins. Water was thrown over the heated stones to create steam, exactly like todays sauna, and when the heat and steam became too overpowering, the Indians simply ran and jumped into the cold waters of Beaver Creek!"

The above text, written in the 1976 Sagitwah Saga: The Story of Whitecourt, describes the sweat lodge: a ceremony to cleanse, clarify and seek guidance that is still conducted in many communities today. In a continuation of tradition, ceremony and protocol have been the cornerstone of Barry's work identifying the trail. Prior to commencing Elder interviews or fieldwork, Barry sought the support of Knowledge-Keeper Jordan Cardinal, a pipe holder and descendent of the Cardinals who lived at McLeod Lake. Per Nakota custom, Barry provided Jordan broadcloth, tobacco, soup and berries as offerings. In the sweatlodge, Barry and Jordan asked for spiritual support for the successful relocation of the historic trail. As Barry puts it: "The Nakota heritage speaks for itself. We put prayers ahead of actions."

Barry's efforts combine desktop mapping exercises, field investigations and Elder interviews. For Barry, the involvement of Nakota Elders is critical to both the research and in the consideration of his future goals. "Clarifying their natural connections to the land base is vital to the development [of these lands] for future generations." Recording more than 70 hours of Elder interviews has been the most rewarding part of the research process. Barry notes that the stories shared in the interviews often made him emotional. "The biggest surprise for me as researcher was the emotions shared by the Elders who were interviewed. I was truly overwhelmed: in every interview the Elders all shed tears when reflecting on the past use and occupations of the land and trails in their territories."

Barry has accessed, largely by foot, much of the landscape southeast of Carson-Pegasus Provincial Park, searching for the historic Nakota trail. On a wintery day in January of 2018, Barry and Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation knowledge-keepers embarked on a site visit to identify the trail.

Near the Hamlet of Blue Ridge, on the north banks of the Athabasca River, stands the Duncan homestead, a long-time stopping place for travelers. People rested and traded here, exchanging whitefish caught at McLeod Lake for fresh meat, vegetables and hay. Behind the homestead on a hill is a single grave, fenced and marked with a cross and red prints. Keri Kidd, the eldest Duncan family sister, has researched who was laid to rest in the cemetery.

Beyond the homestead, a break in the trees; a faint trail extends to the northwest. The participants return to their vehicles and drive several kilometres along the existing oil and gas roads in the general direction of the trail. On an access road to a wellsite, they stop again: the trail can be seen here too. The Elders are pleased but not surprised. Back in the office, aerial imagery of the area will show approximately two kilometres of intact trail located here.

For now, the trail ends along the northern shores of McLeod Lake, in what is now Carson-Pegasus Provincial Park. The Stoney name for this landscape translate to, "Good Fish Lake" or "Where the Fish are Good." Elders remember when the lakes were filled with whitefish—blue and silver in colour with stout bodies, and their flavour was "like no other."

Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation Elders and members during trail identifications. From left: Ted Kyme, Barry Mustus, Lawrence Cardinal, Ringo Aginas, George Letendre and Rene Letendre. The trail can faintly be seen to the right.
Photo credit: Laura Golebiowski

Replaced with trout from fish-stocking initiatives, whitefish are now hard to come by here, the Elders say. With the identification of natural gas in the region in the 1950s, a Mobil Oil pump station brought water from the Athabasca River to the McLeod Lake bed. In interviews conducted more than two decades ago, Barry recalls the Elders frustration that the Mobil Oil pump station killed the lake's whitefish. "Naturally, the province had to attempt to recreate a vital source of livelihood that Indigenous peoples had relied on for generations," he says about the fish-stocking initiatives. Barry also stresses that the creation of Carson-Pegasus Provincial Park in 1982 was done without obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, and that this action was in contravention of the spirit and intent of the Treaties.

Oral histories, archival documentation and archaeology indicate that Nakota peoples occupied McLeod Lake prior to signing Treaty, as well as after. From the 1930s to the 1950s, cabins used to dot the shoreline, and structure foundations and historic remnants can still be found if one has a keen eye. These were seasonal trapping cabins, where community members would spend the winter. This was a gathering place for multiple communities, including the Nakota, Saulteaux and Chipewyan. Families would travel by dog sled to visit and participate in round dances in the wintertime. The women would maintain the cabins while the men trapped in the Swan Hills, then the families would return south on the trails for the summer.

Barry Mustus (seated) leads Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation Elders and members through a mapping exercise in advance of field verifications.
Photo credit: Laura Golebiowski.

History of Alberta

The land known as Alberta was inhabited by first Nations people arriving at least 10,000 BC.

European explorers first appeared in the 1750s as fur trade expanded across the western North America. The first written account of present-day Alberta was recorded by fur trader Anthony Henday, an employee of the British Hudson Bay Company (HBC), accompanied by a band of Cree, who explored the vicinity of present-day Red Deer and Edmonton in 1754–55. Henday was followed by Peter Pond in 1778, employed by the Montreal-based North West Company (NWC) to travel down the Athabasca river and established the first fur trading post in the province. The two rival companies begin building trading posts in the last quarter of the 18th century along the major northern rivers; the Athabasca, North Saskatchewan, and Peace. Many of Alberta's cities and towns started as either HBC or NWC trading posts, including Fort Edmonton. The HBC and NWC eventually merged in 1821 under the new Hudson Bay Company.

Christian missionaries began to challenge the fur traders for possession of the territory by the middle of the 19th century. Methodist Robert Rundle became the first resident cleric in 1840, followed two years later by Roman Catholic Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault, who arrived in Lac Ste Anne in 1842.

The new Hudson Bay Company controlled and governed in the area until 1870 when the Canadian government abolished the HBC's trade monopoly and took possession of the all HBC territory including all of the future province of Alberta.

Alberta got its Name when the Provincial District of Alberta was created in 1882 by Order-in-Council of the North West Territories, the Marques of Lorne was Governor General of Canada at the time. He named the province in honour of his wife, fourth daughter of Queen Victoria, Princess Louise Caroline Alberta.

The Dominion Lands Act 1872 (which provided low-cost homesteads), the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway which reached Calgary in 1885 and aggressive promotional campaigns brought an influx of settlers from eastern Canada, United States and Europe; as population of the area rose from 1000 non-native settlers to 17,500 in 1891.

First Nations had been decimated by European diseases and the disappearance of buffalo their main source of livelihood. The signing of treaties relegated the remaining First Nations people to reserves (reservations), but not before the abuses of unscrupulous traders had hastened the creation of the North-West Mounted Police (now the Royal Canadian Mounted Police). In 1874 the Mounties established Fort Macleod and laid the bases of Canadian law enforcement in Alberta.

Responsible government (government in which the executive branch is drawn from and answerable to an elected legislative branch) developed gradually from 1875, when the North-West Territories Act went into effect, until 1897, when a fully responsible legislative assembly was elected. Made a district of the North-West Territories in 1882, Alberta was enlarged to its present boundaries in 1905, when it was made a province of Canada, although crown lands and natural resources remained under federal control until 1930. By 1901 the population had reached 73,000. Over the next decade prosperity reigned as immigration accelerated, grain harvests were bountiful and new communities sprung up as a network of railway lines rapidly expanded. By 1911 the province's population ballooned to 374,000. The development of earlier-maturing and more disease-resistant varieties of wheat made crop farming less risky and, in northern areas, newly feasible. Subsequently a wheat-based economy expanded throughout most of the province.

When the Dominion government undertook the township survey of land north of the Pembina River near present day Sangudo in 1906, the only settlers were a few trappers, although some had the idea of developing the countryside for ranching purposes. The subdivision of the area into quarter sections, however, meant that the government wanted it to be made into farms by homesteaders. Not too much happened for the next three years, as the district was so remote from a rail centre. However, in 1909, the government opened a Dominion Land Office in Grouard and began subdividing the Grande Prairie area for homesteading. That same year, the Alberta government announced a vast program of railway development by guaranteeing the bonds of major railway companies. As a result, the Canadian Northern (CN) Railway soon announced its intention to build a line to the Grande Prairie.

In 1910, settlers began to take up homesteads north of the Pembina, even though Canadian Northern put its Peace River line on hold for two years. By the end of 1912 however, the line was completed past Onoway, to a point called Peace River Junction. The following year CN began work on a trestle bridge over the Pembina. This brought a horde of settlers to the land north of the Pembina. Although the bridge would not be completed until 1918, due to the demands of World War One, the area was essentially 'settled' at this time

Edmonton, a distribution centre that became the capital, grew rapidly, as did other urban centres. Calgary boomed with the discovery of oil at Turner Valley in 1914. Medicine Hat and Lethbridge, the latter a coal-mining area since the 1870s, developed into important distribution centres. Railways spread over most of the province, increasing agricultural development and providing a ready market for Alberta's vast coal deposits.

Alberta's Oologist

In a quiet corner of Alberta, one of the world's greatest egg collections was born.
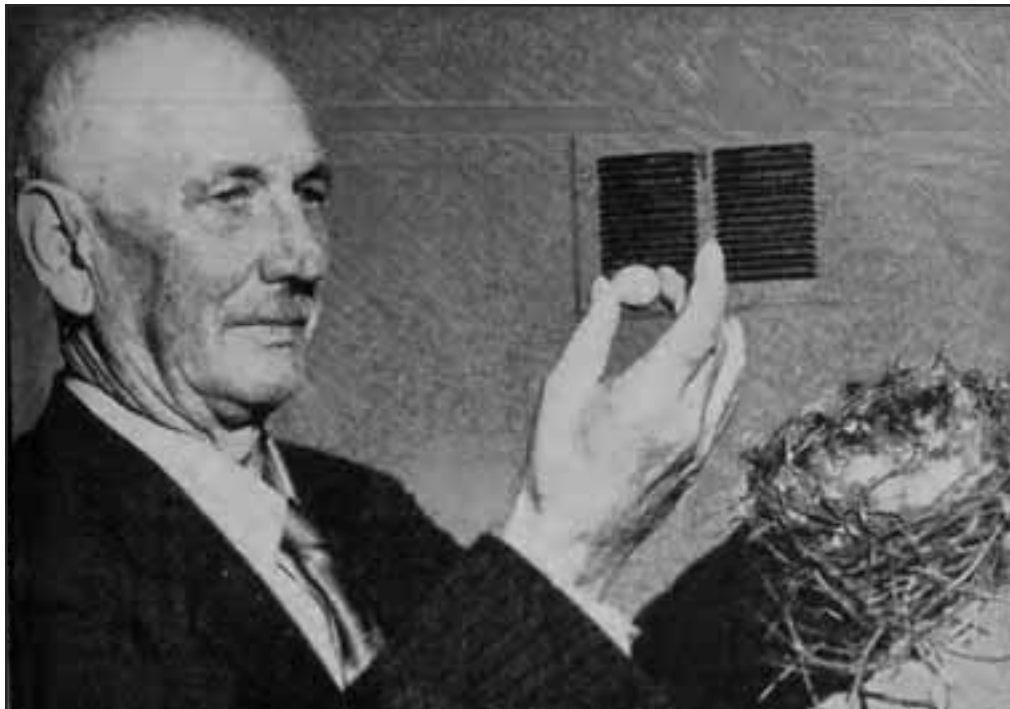
Archibald (Archie) Douglas Henderson, Alberta's Foremost Oologist, 1878 - 1963.
Blue Jay, vol.48, issue 2.
Saskatchewan Natural History Society

As the old HBC pack trail was fading back into the forest, word of gold in the Yukon soon had this artery to the north pulsing with life. Archie Henderson arrived in Edmonton from Barrie, Ontario in 1897 with the Klondike in his crosshairs. He planned to take the overland route north from Edmonton, not the more common sea route through Skagway, Alaska via Vancouver or Seattle. But, as he was making his preparations, the horror stories of death and starvation along the trail started streaming back to Edmonton along with the broken souls of potential prospectors who gave up their dreams.

Henderson reached Belvedere, then known as MacDonald's Crossing, in 1899. The gold rush was over and the last of the prospectors were trickling through. In the search for hay meadows to start ranching, Henderson was grazing his stock around the northeast end of Lac La Nonne when he decided to put up a trading post in the area. He quickly took up a hobby he had brought with him from Ontario - egg collecting.

Henderson had a licence down east to collect eggs for scientific purposes and soon became Alberta's foremost oologist. But, Henderson was a busy man, continuing to raise horses and cattle and run his store. The area began to attract more and more homesteaders as surveyors and land agents spread word of its lush meadows and open waterways. These new residents started to frequent Henderson's store, trading furs in exchange for credit on their accounts.

From about 1900 onwards, Henderson's passion took up most of his time, soon landing the attention of other egg enthusiasts. His home soon became a headquarters for these men whom he would guide through the areas surrounding Lac La Nonne, Lake Majeau, and the Pembina River in search of eggs from local bird species.

In 1925, Henderson and his wife Annie travelled north from Fort Assiniboine on the old Klondike Trail into the Swan Hills and the muskegs of grizzly country. From there, they went over to Goose Lake in search of the Bonaparte's Gull and were the second people in North America to find one of its elusive nests, the first being Hudson's Bay Company traders in the Arctic in 1866. He also identified and collected specimens of a new subspecies of short-billed dowitcher, now named limnodromus griseus hendersoni in his memory.

Over his career, Henderson - who couldn't remember how old he was when he started his hobby - traded with collectors around the world, amassing a collection of 8,000 eggs from 930 species, including exotic finds such as alligator eggs and eggs from the extinct passenger pigeon. He retired from egg collecting in 1953 and later moved to Barrhead with Annie, where he died in 1963. His meticulous records and writings are still valued avian resources for the northwest of the province. However, his egg collection is no longer here. After his death, Annie sold them to a Swiss collector named Werner Holler.

ALBERTA BEACH - Village in Lac Ste. Anne County

In 1912 the Canadian Northern Railway (CN) built into what is now Alberta Beach, it brought its employees out for company picnics and holidays. By 1920 they had incorporated the area as a summer village.

Alberta Beach became so popular that the Moonlight Express was started. CN picked people up in Edmonton on Saturday mornings, took them to Alberta Beach, then picked them up Sunday night to take them back to Edmonton. Soon people began purchasing and building their own cabins and small businesses. On January 1, 1999, the Summer Village of Alberta Beach officially became a Village.

Alberta Beach 1956

Fort Assiniboine

Fort Assiniboine was built in 1823 following the 1821 merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. The fort was fortified, in 1825, after a forest trail was completed between Fort Edmonton and Fort Assiniboine, creating a safer and faster southern route connecting the Saskatchewan and Athabasca river systems. It remained an important post for a quarter century until the Hudson's Bay Company again changed its shipping routes, excluding Fort Assiniboine. The scarcity of furs, the centralization of company administration, and the security of the Canadian-American frontier led to the abandonment of Fort Assiniboine in 1842. It was closed in 1877 and the abandoned shells of the buildings were burned down a short time later.

Fort Assiniboine is a hamlet in northwest Alberta, within Woodlands County. It is located along the north shore of the Athabasca River at the junction of Highway 33 and Highway 661. It is approximately 39 kilometers (24 mi) northwest of Barrhead, 62 kilometers (39 mi) southeast of Swan Hills and 91 kilometers (57 mi) northeast of Whitecourt.

Fort Assiniboine was founded as a trading post by the Hudson's Bay Company, and gets its name from the Assiniboine people. Built following the merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company in 1821. The fort was fortified, in 1825, after a road was completed between Fort Edmonton and Fort Assiniboine, creating a safer and faster southern route connecting the Saskatchewan and Athabasca river systems. It remained an important post for a quarter century until the Hudson's Bay Company again changed its shipping routes, excluding Fort Assiniboine.

Fort Assiniboine became a transportation centre for goods being transported to Lesser Slave Lake post, Jasper House and Dunvegan after George Simpson had a trail cut from Fort Edmonton to Fort Assiniboine. This trail continued to be used up to the 1870s, and was revived in 1897-98 as part of the Chalmers Trail, cut to assist travellers trying to reach the Klondike gold fields through Canada.

Local oral history tells of an early *(possibly late 1700s)* North West Company fur trading post south of Holmes Crossing *(an early ferry crossing)* on the Athabasca River. In 1821, the North West Company was merged with Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), who then undertook to reorganize its transportation routes, seeking out advantages and efficiencies in its operations. By then, trade on Lesser Slave Lake was in decline and the council adopted a resolution in 1823 calling for a fort further up the Athabasca River to reduce transport times. Under the new plan, Fort

BLUE RIDGE
- Hamlet in Woodlands County

A lumber mill to the north of Blue Ridge, operated by Blue Ridge Lumber Inc., is the main employer for the community. The hamlet also offers services to the oil and gas industry and the surrounding agricultural community. It is midway between the towns of Whitecourt and Mayerthorpe.

CAMPSIE
- Hamlet in County of Barrhead

The hamlet took its name, in 1909, from Campsie, in Scotland, the ancestral home of an early postmaster. The community was a block settlement established by Black Canadian homesteaders from Oklahoma and Texas, within four to five years of Alberta becoming a province in 1905.

Assiniboine on the Athabasca River *(the fort was originally named 'Athabaska River House')* became the northwest end of an overland 129 kilometers (80 mi) horse track to Edmonton House/Fort Edmonton, cut by Jacques Cardinal, a Métis free trader, in 1824-25. The trail became known as 'The Hudson Bay Packtrail'. This provided a straighter route from Jasper House and the Athabasca Pass within the Rocky Mountains to York Factory on Hudson Bay. A party on horseback could make the trip from Edmonton to Fort Assiniboine in two to six days, depending on conditions.

The new route was used by the York Factory Express. The old canoe route was known as Methye Portage route. Though Fort Assiniboine never grew as large as some other Alberta forts, its role as a transportation hub and provision centre ensured its survival.

The scarcity of furs, the centralization of company administration, and the security of the Canadian-American frontier led to the abandonment of Fort Assiniboine in 1842. It was closed in 1877 and the abandoned shells of the buildings were burned down a short time later.

The earliest homesteads in the area were filed in 1906 in the Holmes Crossing district *(named for the ferryman William B. Holmes)*, across the Athabasca and down river from Fort Assiniboine. Most came via Edmonton, by way of the Hudson's Bay Pack Trail, which had been widened by then to accommodate wagons and sleights. The graded road only went to about 16 km (10 miles) west of Mo-

rinville. By 1908 settlers crossed on the ferry and took up land north of the Athabasca River, including around the site of the old fort. The Fort Assiniboine post office was set up in 1910, operated, as was the practice, from a local homestead. Joseph Brewster was the first postmaster. A blacksmith's shop, and a store were soon built near the fort site. In 1914, the railway was built to Westlock, shortening the route on the trail significantly. In 1956 a bridge was built across the Athabasca River and in 1959 a highway was completed into the Swan Hills area *(now known as the Grizzly Trail)*.

The highway helped to open the Swan Hills area to oil and natural gas exploration and development. A number of saw and lumber mills have operated in the area since the early

20th century. Local residents also farm, and some have found employment in the tourism industry. Incorporated as a village in 1958, Fort Assiniboine gave up this status in 1991 and is now part of Woodlands County.

No design plans existed for the original layout of the fort, however; using clues from post administrators' log books and archaeological surveys, a likened reproduction was built on the site in 1980. It operates as a museum and friendship centre.

Though the fort itself no longer exists, the land on which it stood is designated as a National Historic Site for its archaeological value. The hamlet, built on and around the site of the fort is a now a local hub for the surrounding agricultural region.

On March 27, 1954 residents of Fort Assiniboine were thrilled at the announcement that a ' bridge would be built leading into the community of Fort Assiniboine.
On Aug. 15, 1956 the bridge was officially opened with approx. 4000 attendees who came to celebrate the completion of the bridge.

CASTLE ISLAND - Summer Village in Lac Ste. Anne County

A French viscount, Charles de Caze, in the 1890s began building a castle on the small island located on the northeast shores of Lac Ste. Anne, which he named Constance Island, in honour of his only daughter. The castle was to be four storeys high, built of stone. The walls were to be 3 feet (0.91 m) thick, and crowning it was to be a stone battlement running all the way around. The castle was to be his retirement home but he died at the age of 44 and did not complete his project. Approximately twenty years later a Mr. Shorty purchased the island. He demolished the castle and transported several cabins to Constance Island. During prohibition it was an excellent spot for parties and fun. Years later he built a causeway which provided better access to the island. Eventually the island was sold, renamed Castle Island, subdivided, and incorporated into a summer village.

The Only Successful Survey of the Klondike Trail

The "all-Canadian" routes from Edmonton to the Klondike during the 1896-1898 Gold Rush.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, GR1979.0269/0125-37

When word of gold put the Yukon on the map in 1897 and sent a stampede of dreamers to the Klondike, Edmonton saw its own chance at prosperity. Immediately, local merchants, the government, and the Edmonton Bulletin newspaper started promoting the easy "All-Canadian Route" to the gold fields. The federal government hoped to keep prospectors in Canada; store owners hoped to attract business to the remote city of 1,500 people by billing Edmonton as the obvious starting point for the journey north.

The old Hudson's Bay Company trail through Fort Assiniboine went the right direction, but had fallen into disuse when that post shut its doors in 1877. And so the information wars began; the Calgary Herald, not wanting its rival city to pull ahead, started criticizing the route; Edmonton papers,

notably the Bulletin, with support from Ottawa, began evoking patriotism, saying it was the duty of British subjects to take the Canadian route and avoid the treacherous Chilkoot Pass. In reality, they had no idea what lay ahead for those taking the overland route.

Edmonton was soon flourishing with activity. The stores were busy - prospectors had to bring two years' worth of supplies with them - and the first group departed on the trail in July 1897. Five days later a party of French Canadians left Edmonton, opting for the sea route instead. This group reached Dawson City precisely two months later on September 29th. The overland group slogged through wilderness for a full year, finally reaching Dawson on July 25, 1898.

The government, perhaps upon hearing of the horrors facing the klondikers, soon realized they needed to

survey the trail. The federal government, the Northwest Territories government, the Edmonton Board of Trade, and the Northwest Mounted Police each launched their own surveys; all but one failed. The federal government's and Board of Trade's surveys both aborted their missions, unable to find a navigable route. The Mounted Police expedition members almost died and had to turn back.

The territorial government's survey, led by T.W. Chalmers, a road engineer, was the only one to satisfy its mandate. Chalmers and his crew set out in late 1897, tasked with surveying and clearing the trail from Edmonton to Fort Assiniboine and then onto Slave Lake. By this time, however, many gold seekers had already started their journey, clueless as to the hardship they were about to face.

Required to carry thousands of pounds of supplies and equipment through 3,000 km of wilderness, prospectors became increasingly ingenious. One man filled massive barrels with his goods and attempted to use them as wheels for his wagon, essentially constructing a wooden bulldozer with which he planned to make the journey. Twelve kilometers out of Edmonton the barrels blew out, spewing his equipment everywhere and rendering his wagon obsolete. He still made it farther than some.

One group from Chicago built a steam tractor-sleigh named "I Will." This beast of a machine featured a 400-pound steam-driven drum fitted with long spikes projecting from its surface. The moment they started it up, "I Will"

CHERHILL
- Hamlet in Lac Ste. Anne County

The hamlet of Cherhill was named in 1911 after the first postmaster A.P. Stecher by adding the word "hill" to the final syllable of his surname "cher".

Cherhill Post Office 1916

Cherhill 1955

dug itself straight into the ground. At least four parties set out to ranch and raise cattle in the Klondike, bringing their herds and haying equipment on the trek north. The furthest any of them made it was 240 km from Edmonton before turning back.

Another wanted to raise turkeys in the Yukon. He realized his horses, who were carrying the caged birds, wouldn't make it when he reached the Swan Hills. He decided to turn back, but not before selling his turkeys for a handsome profit to those starving and stuck in the mud.

Indeed, it was in the Swan Hills that most ended their journeys. By December 1897, Chalmers had plotted a trail, but said it was largely impassable. In fact, he recommended no travel to and over the Swan Hills until a proper trail could be cut. It was too little, too late; hundreds of men and thousands of horses were already on their way.

Of the entire 3000-kilometre journey, the Swan Hills was the most horrifying. It was the Chilkoot Pass of the Overland Route, only six times longer. If travellers and their horses survived to Peace River Country there was no clear trail to continue on. Many prospectors started heading to Athabasca Landing after hearing of a 250 mile Water Route, only to discover the last 78 miles were continuous rapids.

To travel 1 km as the crow flies, klondikers had to zig zag roughly 5 km through bush, cut down trees, go around muskeg, crawl and climb around woody debris. When one group got stuck in the mud, all parties behind them got blocked and had to cut a new trail around. It could take a whole day to go a mere 3 km.

There were so many dead trees littering the ground that horses tore flesh from their legs trying to step through them, in some instances continuing all the way to the bone. Some travellers recounted being able to find the path of a group by following the trail of blood drops on fallen timber. To make matters worse, most gold rushers had vastly underestimated the length of the journey, not bringing enough food for their horses. Feed was scarce in the Swan Hills, and there was an abundance of larkspur, which can poison a horse if its roots are dug up and eaten. Because of this, many horses weren't allowed to graze and quickly starved to death if they didn't die from exhaustion first. Some klondikers were less experienced with pack horses and simply left the packs on for weeks at a time until the horses were bleeding and covered in infected sores.

In all, 4,000 horses embarked for the Klondike. More than 2,000 died in the Swan Hills, averaging a dozen deaths per mile, leaving the trail littered with bones and corpses. Not a single horse survived to the Yukon; one strong steed made it to Fort St. John, dying there less than halfway to Dawson City.

Chalmers' team finished cutting their trail in July 1898 by which time the rush was drying up and the trail was no longer needed. Indigenous and Metis people found Chalmers' trail laughable, pointing out that if he had consulted them, they could've shown him an old route that bypassed most of the muskeg and was 30 km shorter.

During the negotiation and signing of Treaty 8 in 1899 and 1900, the treaty commission used portions of the trail. O.C. Edwards, a member of this group recounted encountering starving, broken men and passing horse bones for two straight days. Some sleighs were abandoned fully intact, indicating that the horses died, leaving the crew stranded. Edwards noted that many people would write their names and hometowns on trees along the trail. By the time he reached Swan River, he only saw one name.

Roughly 1,500 people attempted the All-Canadian Route; three dozen died, but most turned back or squatted where they were, becoming some of the settlers in this part of the province. Only 160 made it to Dawson City from Edmonton - mostly near the end of the rush or after it was over - accounting for a miniscule fraction of the 100,000 klondikers who charged into the Yukon.

As for Chalmers, he volunteered for the Boer War a few years later and was killed trying to rescue his sergeant. A cabin he built near Swan River burned down in the second half of the 20th century. Doug Borg, a resident of Fort Assiniboine, said the forestry industry burned all the old cabins in the area to prevent people from living in them. He retraced the old trail, almost 100 years after Chalmers surveyed it. Borg put a stake in the ground at the site of his former cabin, a small piece of wood that pays testament to an epic trail now swallowed by bush.

DARWELL - Community in Lac Ste. Anne County

A rail station in 1912 also created the community of Darwell, located between Lac Ste. Anne and Isle Lake. The naming of this station caused many debates with no resolution, until an enterprising man took out his hymn book and randomly picked a good tune. The tune had the name Darwell in it. Darwell became known as "hobo stop" because of a ranch which never turned away anyone asking for shelter. Many men out of work rode the rail to Darwell to get food and lodging in exchange for work. As the story goes many men wanted by the law also found refuge, and the NWMP made many trips to the Hobo Ranch. Today Darwell has a store, garage, and school. The old ranch has long disappeared.

GLENEVIS
- Hamlet in Lac Ste. Anne County

Glenevis is a hamlet north of Lac Ste. Anne was named in 1913 on the suggestion of John McLeod, an early homesteader, whose wife came from Glennevis, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. The second "n" was omitted.

The Klondike Trail (AKA Chalmers Trail)

The Chalmers Trail of a century ago was a 120 mile trail from the Athabasca River crossing at Fort Assiniboine to the Slave Lake settlement *(modern day Grouard)*. The trail was cut to provide Klondike gold seekers with an overland route by which to reach Peace River Crossing, the first leg of the 1500 mile trip to the Klondike. Today, the Chalmers Trail is generally known as the Klondike Trail.

Unfortunately, the last one hundred years has not been kind to the trail. In places it is still visible by air, but in others it is completely overgrown. Parts of the trail have been incorporated into the web of forestry, oil and gas roads that crisscross the area. In other places it has been lost in bogs due to increased beaver activity or lost in forestry cut blocks. Some of it has been ploughed under and sowed to grain and some has been upgraded to county secondary roads. However, in places, the wagon ruts of a century ago are evident and corduroy can be found, still well preserved under layers of moss and mud. In its day it was a very challenging and lonely trail, one without any stopping houses to provide travelers and their horses with warmth, food and rest. To our knowledge, the last party to travel the whole trail with horses was a group of R.C.M.P. officers and others who made the grueling trek in celebration of the R.C.M.P. Centennial in 1973.

The concept of the Chalmers Trail began with the editor of the Edmonton *Bulletin*. The merchants of the small town of Edmonton saw an opportunity for economic prosperity when the news of a goldstrike in the Yukon Territory burst upon the continent in 1897. Gold seekers began arriving in Edmonton as early as June and July of '97. It seemed clear that Edmonton's future was to become the "Gateway to the Klondike" and the *Bulletin* fiercely promoted all-Canadian overland routes to the Yukon which became known as the Edmonton routes. Easy trips to the Klondike on well marked trails were advertised in papers all across Canada and the USA. The *Bul-*

Thomas Wellington Chalmers

letin, the mayor of Edmonton and the Board of Trade lobbied the Dominion government to have a trail cut from Edmonton to Peace River Crossing and on to the Yukon.

On September 9, 1897, the government of the North West Territories *(Alberta did not become a province until 1905)* sent T.W. Chalmers, a road engineer, on a reconnaissance trip to mark a trail from Edmonton to the settlement on Lesser Slave Lake. He returned to Edmonton on November 7, and left the next day with a crew of axemen to improve the old Hudson's Bay packtrail to Fort Assiniboine and to cut a wagon road from there to Lesser Slave Lake.

By the end of 1897 Chalmers was cutting his way up the south slope of the Swan Hills and tenders had been sent out for the right to operate ferries at the crossings of the Pembina River, the Athabasca River, the narrows at the Slave Lake settlement and the Peace River. On the banks of the Athabasca at Fort Assiniboine, a stopping house was built with stables that could hold forty horses. However, Chalmers could not stay ahead of the rush of eager men looking for gold.

Several parties left Edmonton soon after Chalmers. The Fugard party, consisting of 120 horses spread out over a distance of fifteen miles, overtook Chalmers' work party shortly after crossing the Athabasca River at Fort Assiniboine. Slashing their own trail they arrived at Lesser Slave Lake on January 15, 1898, and made light of the trip. Several others were right behind. In July Chalmers' work was completed. He reported that a trail 10 to 16 feet wide had been cut, but that it was in need of fill in the low places and additional grading. Ironically, by this time the rush was over. The last party to leave for the Yukon, using the Chalmers Trail, left Edmonton in August of '98.

Did all parties fare as well as Fugard on the trail? By the spring of '98, traffic was two-way. Some gold seekers were overcome by the horrific conditions on the trail. Approximately one hundred turned back. Trees were blazed with uncomplimentary messages about what the travelers thought

FORT ASSINIBOINE SANDHILLS WILDLAND PARK - northeast of Fort Assiniboine

Fort Assiniboine Sandhills Wildland Park covers about 66 square kilometers along the north shore of the Athabasca River northeast of Fort Assiniboine. It includes Pemmican Island and other islands in the Athabasca River. It was designated a wildland park in 1997, instead of a provincial park, to reflect the backcountry use and low level of development intended for the park. The eastern two-thirds of the park is covered by sand dunes that are part of a larger dune field extending northeast along the Athabasca River. The park contains a high diversity of vegetation types and plant species- 436 vascular and non- vascular plants. Twenty of these species are classified as provincially rare. Old growth mixed wood forests in the Athabasca River valley and on some upland areas are 180+ years old. They harbor species that favor old growth, such as pileated woodpeckers, bay- breasted warblers, black-throated green warblers, magnolia warblers, Cape May warblers, and flying squirrels. They also contain the highest number of rare plants in the park.

Cutting the Chalmers Trail

The Klondike Trail's Next Chapter

The history books tell us that the Klondike Trail fell out of use after a wave of settlers moved through the area in the early 20th century. Yet these books are missing a chapter on the local Indigenous people for whom the route remained a crucial lifeline for decades to come.

The ancestors of the region's First Nations established the original pathways that became the Klondike Trail, using it from prehistoric times until after the treaties were signed. In the wake of the gold rushers and homesteaders, a new generation took to the path: Indigenous children running away from residential schools. The grandmother of Ron Arcand, an elder at Alexander First Nation, was one of them. As a young girl, she would make the 35-kilometer journey from her school in St. Albert back to the reserve to reunite with her family. She and other kids made this trek along the historic trail many times, but the authorities would always catch up with them sooner or later, faithfully separating them from their families.

Ron, 74, is a residential school survivor himself. By the time he went to school in Maskwacis *(previously known as Hobbema)*, cars and highways had largely replaced horses and wagon trails. He had to hitchhike whenever he ran away from residential school, but the Indian agent, having his own vehicle, would always be waiting for Ron at Alexander before he ever made it home.

Still, Ron is no stranger to the Klondike Trail, which runs right through the reserve and traditional territory of Alexander First Nation. His great-great-grandfather Chief Katstaweskum signed Treaty 6 in 1877; their reserve, which the government later reduced in size, was surveyed a couple years later.

Throughout his youth, Ron's grandfather and great-uncle maintained traplines up along the Klondike Trail in the Swan Hills and Fort Assiniboine area. The two of them would set out from the reserve each October and live off the land until Christmas time, bringing with them only some flour, tea, salt, and a few potatoes.

They had a small cabin at one end of the trapline and would make a lean-to, to camp in at the other. Every morning the pair spent most of the day walking the length of the

of the trail. Mr. Frank Walker of Fort Saskatchewan, who started on the Chalmers Trail in March, 1898, says in his memoirs that he found "dead horses in abundance", mostly dead of starvation. Others claimed the trail was not passable for wagons and sleighs and that they had not brought adequate supplies of hay and grain for the length of time it took to negotiate the trail. Chalmers had reported that forage was scarce, especially in the Swan Hills from the Swan River to the lakeshore. Bark and frozen moss was all there was to sustain the horses. Chalmers also noted that parties traveled non-stop from the Saulteux River to the Swan River, a distance of 34 miles, because they were afraid that the hungry horses would pull up and eat larkspur root and poison themselves. Some parties were losing horses at the rate of one to two per day. Accidents, inexperience with packing and driving horses, lack of information about the conditions to be faced, mud and insects in summer, and cold and snow in the winter all took their toll on horseflesh and the human spirit. Pierre Burton, in his book Klondike, estimates that two thousand horses died in the Swan Hills. Fortunately, only one human death on the Chalmers Trail has been recorded, that of a little girl buried along the trail by her father about eight miles east of Fort Assiniboine.

In total more than 1500 gold seekers left Edmonton for the Klondike or other potential gold bearing areas. Of the 1500, an estimated 766 men, 9 women and 4000 horses embarked on one of the overland routes to Peace River crossing. Of the overlanders, only 160 men, no women, and no horses reached the Klondike.

GEOGRAPHIC CENTRE OF ALBERTA - located in Woodlands County

Born and raised in the Swan Hills area, Roy Chimiuk knew that this part of northern Alberta was really the center of Alberta. As a surveyor Chimiuk was able to calculate the exact Geographic Center of Alberta. Cutting out the 5 km path from the rugged and heavily forested area opened up a piece of Alberta history that had been locked in the silent forest. The path leads you through the beautiful boreal forest and opens to a small clearing where a cairn awaits. This cairn has a grizzly cub sitting on a stone pillar which was created in 1993 by mason Horst Lutz. To insure that the center is not forgotten and remembered only by the forest, a time capsule was place in the cairn. This twenty five year capsule was due to be opened in 2018. On September 10, 1989 the Center of Alberta was officially recognized when one hundred (100) people made the hike to the geographical center.

line, collecting any kills and resetting the snares, before spending much of the night skinning and stretching the furs.

Ron remembers his grandfather and great-uncle returning every December with a handsome profit from the furs they had collected. Having little use for money, though, they would give their earnings away to their kids and grandchildren. During summer breaks, Ron often joined his grandfather, along with other relatives, to live along the trail and hunt, trap, gather, or take seasonal work around Swan Hills.

Up to six of them slept together in the old cabin, which measured approximately 10 feet by 10 feet. His grandfather worked on a pipeline there during the day and hunted in the evenings, often for moose. When ammo ran low, he'd set snares for deer and rabbit. During these summers along the Klondike Trail, Ron and other youth learned how to collect duck eggs, pick and dehydrate berries, harvest muskeg tea, and smoke game meat over wooden tripods.

A few years later, Ron started attending St. Francis Xavier High School in Edmonton where he used his reputation as a strong athlete to gain the respect of his predominately white classmates. He transferred to NAIT after grade 10 and studied carpentry before taking a job at a lumber yard in the city.

These days Ron spends a lot of time passing on stories and knowledge to the younger generations. He is also widely known amongst Indigenous communities as an Eagle Keeper, someone who safeguards and collects sacred eagle feathers for ceremonial, religious, and community purposes.

While the Klondike Trail has changed much since Ron's youth, it continues to serve as an important connection to his people's land. It was only a few years ago that Ron last journeyed down this ancient pathway, taking quads on an expedition guided by another elder.

Father Lacombe

Father Albert Lacombe, late 1800s or early 1900s.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, A2283.

There's hardly a larger figure from Alberta's fur trading days and early provincehood. Father Lacombe established missions and settlements, forged alliances between enemy nations, and won respect across the land.

He was born in 1827 in the Montreal area and grew up on a farm. Lacombe studied theology early in his life, but was also captivated by stories of buffalo hunts, great Indigenous nations, and the challenge of proselytizing the western part of the continent. His career as an oblate began at the Red River Settlement in 1849. Two years later he transferred to Fort Edmonton, a wooden outpost in the Western Plains, largely the domain of the Cree and Blackfoot. Lacombe himself had a small amount of Indigenous heritage, something he was able to leverage to make inroads with the local population.

Shortly after arriving in Edmonton, Lacombe left for Lac Ste. Anne to establish a mission for the Metis and Cree of the area. The mission later became the site of the famous Lac Ste. Anne Pilgrimage, annually attracting tens of thousands of worshippers from Catholic and First Nations communities all over the continent.

Lacombe began learning Cree, the lingua franca of the area. Something that helped him establish relations with the Indigenous people was his openness to understanding their culture; he didn't discount Indigenous wise men or medicine men as some oblates did. His priorities were, apart from spreading his faith, to teach agriculture and help the sick.

While Lacombe was successful in expanding his parish north of Lesser Slave Lake, he didn't have much luck

GOOSE LAKE (also known as Lone Pine)
- Hamlet in Woodlands County

Goose Lake, also known as Lone Pine, is a hamlet in northwest Alberta within Woodlands County. It is located approximately 37 km northeast of Highway 43 and 136 km northwest of Edmonton. Goose Lake is often referred to as Lone Pine due to the location of its former post office at the former Lone Pine Store, which was located near the intersection of Highway 658 and Township Road 614B—the road that provides access to the hamlet and the Goose Lake Campground.

in swaying those at his mission to abandon their nomadic ways for a more settled, European-style life of farming. In 1861 he decided to establish a new mission in an area more conducive to farming. After finding a suitable location on the Sturgeon River, St. Albert was born.

Still, Lacombe had a curious soul and a drive to preach. With a touch of irony, he took a new directive in 1865 to become a nomad himself and travel the lands of the Cree and Blackfoot, bringing them the word of God. He lived this life for 15 years, preaching across the entire region that would become Alberta.

Despite their bitter and bloody rivalry, Lacombe maintained good relations with both the Cree and the Blackfoot, and always tried to broker peace. Lacombe was present for several battles between these nations, including a larger fight during which he walked through the battlefield beseeching the warriors to lay down their arms. Before long, a stray bullet struck the Father, sending him to the ground, but without serious injury. Nevertheless, the fighting stopped at once and the nations agreed to a truce.

Keeping the peace, however, was never easy. During his travels he once encountered a small band of Cree at Sandy Lake. As Lacombe was settling in for the evening, a young warrior rode in accompanied by his slave - a young woman he had recently captured from the Blackfoot. The priest knew this could have catastrophic consequences, reigniting war between the two powerhouses of the prairies. He offered to buy the woman from the warrior, at first offering a horse and some clothes in exchange. The warrior refused, saying that this woman could be his wife and if he sold her, he would not have enough to buy another one. Lacombe sweetened the deal, adding a blanket and his companion's horse to the pot. Still, the warrior balked at the offer. That is until Lacombe offered to throw his shoes into the deal, too. A smile crept across the young bachelor's face. Not only would he collect considerable bounty for his captive, he would also see the priest walk home barefoot. The deal was finalized and the exchange made. However, the chief soon arrived, promptly ordering the warrior to return everything and let the girl go. She travelled with Father Lacombe back to St. Albert, where she stayed until accompanying him on his next visit to Blackfoot country.

A few years later a 700-strong Blackfoot war party set out for Fort Edmonton. Some Cree had attacked them and killed one of their chiefs before making their way to the fort. The Blackfoot warriors seized some wagons from traders as they were crossing the river. The traders made it across on the ferry at the cost of their cargo. They didn't send the ferry back and the war party wasn't able to ford the river due to high waters. The Blackfoot set up camp in today's Walterdale and taunted the fort, peppering it with musket shots from across the valley.

Fort Edmonton was in a dangerous position; they currently had less than 150 men and were running low on ammunition. But, the Blackfoot didn't know this. Lacombe was then able to tell them that if they attacked the fort, its defenders would probably use the "great gun" on them, likely referring to a canon. In addition, he reassured them that the Cree would face appropriate repercussions for slaying the chief. The Blackfoot trusted Lacombe and turned home satisfied, sparing Fort Edmonton. Unfortunately, smallpox would decimate both the Cree and Blackfoot before the year was out. Father Lacombe estimated 3,000 lost their lives.

Lacombe spent the rest of his life in the west and refused all promotions; he was offered a bishopship three times. The Father won the respect, friendship, and trust of many influential Indigenous leaders, using his position to mediate treaty negotiations and help maintain peace on the prairies during the North-West Rebellion. Crucially, he received assurances from Chief Crowfoot that he would keep Blackfoot warriors out of the conflict.

Father Lacombe continued to minister to First Nations well into the 1900s, winning many converts over his career. After he passed away in 1916, the Cree and Blackfoot came together to pay their respects. While his body was buried in St. Albert, his heart was removed, one story goes, and buried deep in Blackfoot country as a testament to his legacy among the original inhabitants of this province.

GOOSE MOUNTAIN ECOLOGICAL RESERVE - 36 km west of the Town of Swan Hills

The Goose Mountain Ecological Reserve (14,283 acres) is situated in the highest portion of the Swan Hills uplands with flat-topped to steeply sloping hills that rise 600 meters above surrounding lowlands. Near the southern boundary is an impressive north-facing escarpment dissected by pronounced gullies. Most extensive vegetation type is coniferous forest, dominated by balsam/subalpine fir crosses, Engelmann/white spruce crosses & lodgepole pine; tall shrub communities of alder and willow occur on moist slopes. The reason for this pocket of rare flora has to do with Swan Hills' elevation. Being the highest point in the province at 1,180 meters above sea level allows for the development of a sub-alpine ecosystem not found anywhere else on the prairies. Public access to Goose Mountain Ecological Reserve is available via the Goose Mountain Fire Tower road from the Town of Swan Hills. This road can be extremely difficult to travel on, especially in wet weather. Use of motorized vehicles is not permitted.

Policing the old trail to Athabasca

*Hauling a 10 ton marine boiler down the
Athabasca Landing Trail, late 1800s/early 1900s.*

Athabasca Archives, AA01793

Until 1899, when Treaty 8 was signed, the land north of Athabasca remained unceded Indigenous territory. This made the Athabasca Landing Trail, in effect, a highway out of government-controlled territory. The lands beyond the Athabasca River, depending on who you were, looked like pristine forest, a lucrative trapping area, or an economic opportunity.

The Northwest Mounted Police were responsible for policing this area and its trails. It was a wide mandate - helping starving Indigenous and settler families, keeping the peace, tracking murderers, and recovering the bodies of unfortunate travellers - but one task, stopping the illegal flow of alcohol into "Indian territory," as it was then referred to, might have been more time consuming than them all.

It was illegal to import liquor to these unceded lands, though this prohibition simply made the profits more handsome. Bootleggers knew there was a market for alcohol among the nomads of the north, turning the Athabasca Landing Trail into a highway for smugglers. It is estimated that almost every northbound wagon held at least one bottle of illegal liquor - the Mounties had a mission to find it.

To skirt police checkpoints, bootleggers would often leave the trail just before Athabasca Landing and travel upstream until they found a tree they could tie the booze to. After that, these men would innocently pass through the checkpoints in Athabasca and wait to spot their cargo floating innocuously down the river.

The authorities eventually got wise to this, driving smugglers to get creative. One rumrunner, known as "Baldy Red," successfully snuck his contraband down the trail by giving a ride to some nuns whose wagon had broken down. This seemingly gracious act afforded him the perfect cover; he knew full well that the police would never put these servants of the Lord through the indignity of a search. Most of Baldy's counterparts weren't as lucky, however. In 1893, police confiscated 130 gallons of illegal alcohol in the Athabasca area; by 1895, this number hit 242 gallons.

Yet, combating the flow of alcohol was hardly the most perplexing task facing the NWMP. The Mounties also had to investigate reports of "Weeghtekos." These members of local Indigenous groups, the story goes, had, as the result of immoral deeds, permitted an evil spirit to take over their souls. This spirit, said to inhabit its hosts in the form of a lump of ice under the skin, drove Weeghtekos to cannibalism.

Actual incidents of cannibalism, more likely caused by starvation, were much rarer than the reports of them seemed to allege. Still, the Indigenous inhabitants of the area reportedly lived in much fear of Weeghtekos.

GREEN COURT

- Hamlet in Lac Ste. Anne County

Green Court 1922

The town was named by the first Postmaster after the playground of a school in England in 1908.

When the railway reached Junkins, Alberta (later Wildwood) a trail was cut from Junkins to Green Court as a route for homesteaders and supplies.

Closing the Klondike Trail: The Last Council

Based on the writings of WGP Allen

Indigenous pilgrims at Lac Ste. Anne, early 1900s. Provincial Archives of Alberta, OB1903.

In 1911, during the annual pilgrimage to Lac Ste. Anne, a group of Cree joined the wagons of Father Lacombe and some priests on the trail west from Edmonton. The party stopped at Deadman Lake, where they spotted the deserted Klondike trail. Once bustling with life, it was now silent, no teamsters or steeds in sight.

After stopping the convoy and making preparations for a meal, everyone was summoned for a ceremony. A Cree chief emerged in full war regalia, chanting in his native tongue. The chief went over to a dead willow bush and removed a stem, continuing his chant as members of his tribe joined in unison. He then walked to the middle of the trail, holding his wooden wand, and pointed first to the south, then the north, followed by east and west. He then broke the wand in two and dropped it on the trail. Everyone fell silent. Father Lacombe spoke with them in Cree before turning to the others and saying, "This was the Indian ceremony that closed the trail through their reserve; the last segment of the old trail through the Pembina Valley."

The land was changing; new roads and the railway had started to bring the trail into obscurity. After a prayer, the group dispersed and continued onto Sandy Lake. They set up camp - in the exact spot where Northwest Company trader Peter Pangman traded with the Cree in 1790 - and lit the council fire. These fires, which Father Lacombe had been attending for decades, were formerly the venue where the decisions that governed the land were made, where stories were told, alliances forged, and plans laid out.

Lacombe told the group of his encounters with David Thompson, who had lost an Indigenous companion on the trailhead near Deadman Lake in 1799. In his view, as an Indigenous person had fallen at the opening of the trail, it was only right for one of their brethren to close it forever.

The Father had some other news as well: Fort Edmonton was slated for dismantling; its day had come and a new way of life was upon the country. For the trails, which had seen a steady stream of feet for thousands of years, it was the end of an era of eras.

GRIZZLY TRAIL - Alberta Provincial Highway No. 33

Established in 1988, the Grizzly Trail is 219 kilometres of Alberta's most scenic and historical routes found in the central part of the province. Following the original Klondike Trail, the Grizzly Trail begins at the junction of Hwy 43 and 33 known locally as "Gunn Corner". The Grizzly Trail travels north to the town of Barrhead, then turns northwest, crossing the Athabasca River at Fort Assiniboine, before reaching the town of Swan Hills. Highway 33 continues north from Swan Hills to Highway 2 east of Kinuso.

Highway 33 originally started as a short highway that connected Highway 43, 7 km south of Onoway, to Alberta Beach. In the 1970s, Highway 33 was extended north to Barrhead from Gunn, resulting in an 8 km gap between Alberta Beach and Gunn. Highway 18, which ran between Barrhead and Swan Hills, was renumbered to Highway 33 and the highway was extended north to Kinuso.

Lac Ste. Anne Mission

Jean-Baptiste Thibault founder of the Lac Ste. Anne Mission

The village of Lac Ste. Anne (the original name is known as Manito-Sakahigan, Spirit Lake) is one of the first permanent Metis communities in what later became Alberta and the first Catholic mission.

In 1841 a local Métis named Piché asked Bishop Provencher in far-off St. Boniface to send a priest to live among them. Priests were scarce. Bishop Provencher had only four priests to minister to a territory that stretched from Ontario to the Rocky Mountains. Still, the next spring he sent Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault to make an exploratory trip of over 1,400 kilometers.

Father Thibault arrived in 1842. Two year laters in 1844 he established the Mission of Lac Ste. Anne. There were 30 French Métis families living there, who had arrived in the 1830s, and the church served the Metis and First Nations of the area who had been converted to Catholicism. He renamed the lake Lac Ste. Anne, honouring Saint Anne. Lac Ste. Anne was in a central location with good fertile fields, tall trees for lumber, and plenty of fish and wildlife. It was also far away from the Hudson's Bay Company politics in Fort Edmonton.

In 1844, a small shack was built to house Fr. Thibault and a young priest named Joseph Bourassa. Fr. Thibault immediately blessed the lake and called it "Lac Ste Anne". This was in fulfillment of a promise he had made to give her name to the first mission he would 'father'. It was the first permanent Catholic mission west of Winnipeg.

The missionaries began the teachings of the Church, and also taught the people how to farm. The people in the area could see the buffalo was declining and the missionaries wanted to make the Metis people into farmers. By 1859 the mission boasted it had 17 fat and fine cows, 15 horses, 10 dogs, 10 cats, and a garden with flowerbeds. Pigs and sheep were not raised because of the dogs and wild predators. Crops included wheat, barley, potatoes, cabbage, onions, and turnips.

In 1859 three Grey Nuns made the journey from Montreal to the Mission., on September 24 Lac Ste. Anne welcomed the nuns. The Sisters began their lives in Lac Ste. Anne by learning the Cree language, starting a school, helping in the gardens and painting the windows of the church so that worshippers would not be distracted during services.

The Mission grew until there were over two thousand people. A Hudson's Bay Company post, a separate school, an orphanage retreat, a North-West Mounted Police barracks, a dance hall, a post office, several stores, saloons and hotels moved into the area complementing the church, rectory and convent.

At one time the mission was larger in population and commerce than Fort Edmonton.

Father Lacombe, who arrived in 1852, left Lac Ste. Anne in 1861 to build a new mission at St. Albert. When he left the mission of Lac Ste. Anne it was almost deserted by pastors and followers of the church. All that was left were a few families, the church, the rectory and the Grey Nun's residence.

By 1887, the buffalo had disappeared and the lake lost its importance as a gathering place. Most of the population moved away and the mission was almost deserted. Its pastor Father Lestanc then decided to close the mission. Then, on his first holiday back home to France in thirty years, he paid a visit to the Shrine of Ste Anne d'Auray.

He later related that while in prayer at this Shrine, God revealed to him in a powerful way that he must not close the mission. Rather, he must build a shrine there in honor of St. Anne, the grandmother of Jesus. It would be a place for pilgrims to come and receive spiritual help.

Fr. Lestanc was deeply moved. On his return, he lost no time in carrying out what God had revealed to him. The first pilgrimage was held in 1889 with several hundred attending. It soon became an annual event, drawing people from all directions and many nations.

GUNN - Hamlet in Lac Ste. Anne County

In the 1900s the Hamlet of Gunn (*named after Peter Gunn, Liberal Member of the Legislature for Lac Ste Anne from 1909 - 1917*) was also developing as a major trade center, consisting mainly of Métis and Indian people. There were two flour mills, a blacksmith shop, the hotel, several stores and trading posts that nestled beside the train station. In the 1930s an Army training center was built where the Gunn housing center now operates. Prosperity reigned until the Army left and the Canadian National Railway removed its rail station.

Gunn 1956

Lac Ste. Anne Pilgrimage

First called Wakamne (or "God's Lake") by the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation who live on the west end of the Lake and Manito Sahkahigan (or "Spirit Lake") by the Cree, the lake was called "Lac Ste Anne" by Rev. Jean-Baptiste Thibault, the first Catholic priest to establish a mission on the site. The pilgrimage grounds had been sacred for generations of peoples and had become widely known as a place of healing.

According to Alexis' oral history, a long time ago a charismatic Nakota chief from the south-east followed his vision and led his people to the shores of the sacred lake Wakamne (God's Lake – Lac Ste Anne). Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation people lived on the site long before the arrival of European fur traders and settlers. The lake and the surrounding area is rich in natural resources and during the early fur trade it used to supply Fort Edmonton with fish. To this day, it remains a spiritual centre celebrated during each annual pilgrimage.

Father Lestanc organized the first pilgrimage to Lac Ste. Anne in 1889 in honour of Saint Anne whose feast day is on July 26.

In the early 1900's the pilgrimage was attended by about 1000 pilgrims each year. Many came from St. Albert and the Morinville area. In 1926 over 5,500 pilgrims attended. Many came by a special train from the city of Edmonton 45 miles away. Today pilgrims come to the lake from all over North America, many walking miles bare-footed as penance to witness or be a part of the miracle of healing. A display of crutches and canes have been left behind in the shrine by pilgrims. Thirty to forty thousand people now attend the annual pilgrimage in the last week of July. Oaths of sobriety, along with other life style promises are made, and prayers and forgiveness are given.

Many priests attended the pilgrimage during these years. Upwards of 20 Oblate priests (most or all who spoke Cree) and often several Redemptorist and Diocesan priests as well.

In 1918 Father Beaudry, OMI, a frequent traveler on the Grand Trunk Railway, obtained a special train from Edmonton and other points. One day was set aside for all other nationalities, so a special train brought a number of pilgrims from Edmonton (WCR 1925) and another train ran from St. Albert, Morinville and Legal. This train service continued until 1936. The trains brought over 2,000 pilgrims to LA.

A road was built in 1926 making it possible to come by car. However, even into the 1940's, the road could turn to mud and become impassable.

In 1926, 2500 indigenous and Métis pilgrims and 3000 more white pilgrims attended the pilgrimage. Pilgrims came from Lac La Biche, Cold Lake, Lesser Slave Lake, Fort Vermillion, Wabasca, Grand Prairie, Île-à-la-Crosse, Peace River, Fond Du Lac, Wainwright, southern Alberta, Onion Lake, and Meadow Lake in Saskatchewan.

The pilgrims included people from Cree, Montagnais, Assiniboine, Chipewyan, Beaver, Sarcee, and Blackfoot nations. They traveled mostly by trail in a traditional manner. Often the journey of the pilgrimage and back home took two months. A mass was held in Cree.

By the 1950's, pilgrims were starting to come from as far away as Wabasca, Frog Lake, Prince Albert, Beauval, Buffalo Narrows, Cluny, Cardston, Montana, California, and Southern Carolina.

Attendance continued to grow with about 4,500 in 1938 and over 6,000 pilgrims in 1950.

In order to bring even more pilgrims, it was decided to change the date of the pilgrimage for the white population from a Thursday to a Sunday afternoon.

In the 1980's, the program was changed from the two-day format, expanding to a full five-day program. A new shrine which could seat up to 4000 people was built in the early 1980's.

The Lac Ste. Anne Pilgrimage was declared a National Historic Site of Canada in 2004 for its social and cultural importance. Today, over 4,000 individuals camp on the site and up to 30,000 pilgrims attend the weekly events. The program includes three daily Eucharistic Services each hosted by different Communities. These communities usually include: The Lac Ste Anne parish, The Alexis and Paul Bands, Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples (national aboriginal parish – Edmonton), the Métis Nation of Alberta, The Blackfoot (rotated among the various parishes), the Cree of Northern Alberta (e.g. Wabasca), the Dogrib from the Northwest Territory and often an aboriginal community from Northern Saskatchewan.

The pilgrimage site is located on the shores of beautiful Lac Ste Anne in Alberta, Canada about 45 miles west of Edmonton.

HOLMES CROSSING SANDHILLS ECOLOGICAL RESERVE - southwest of Fort Assiniboine

Holmes Crossing Sandhills Ecological Reserve was established in 1997 to protect the transverse sand dunes. Located on the south side of the Athabasca River southwest of the hamlet of Fort Assiniboine. Covering 4900 acres, its name comes from the local settlement of Holmes Crossing, which was named after the settlement's ferryman William Holmes. Jack Pine and Aspen are the major trees species, they grow in pure stands or mixed wood forests on the upland sand dunes. In moister sites along the river valley, White Spruce, Aspen and Balsam Poplar dominate, and most are frequently part of mixed wood forests. A variety of wetlands occur in the depressions between the sand dunes. Deer and moose use the river valley extensively. Black bear, snowshoe hare, red squirrel and beaver are also common. Bird species are numerous and in the pine forests are common nighthawk, solitary vireo, pine siskin and purple finch. The dunes are the most unique feature of the reserve, that are formed in wave-like ridges transverse to the prevailing wind direction.

Town of Westlock

The Edgson Brothers: Frank, Charles, Jack and Art

Prior to European settlement, the area around Westlock was inhabited by First Nations people, notably the Cree. The Indigenous inhabitants would follow the bison through the region as artifacts of the Indigenous people have been found over the years. The fur trade became active from the 1760s onward, as fur traders and explorers came through the area. The first mention of the district in writing would be thanks to David Thompson, who came through in April of 1799.

The very earliest records of the Indigenous being in the area comes from archaeological research. It is believed the original inhabitants to come through the area were incursions from the Plains Indigenous. The area was covered in boreal forest and the Indigenous who arrived, became the Athapaskan-speaking Beaver people who themselves would be replaced by the Algonquin-speaking Cree.

Many settlers and farmers have found projectile points on their land and many of these have been placed in the Pioneer Museum.

It is believed that when the fur trade opened up, around 1750 in the west, the Cree entered the area living as mobile groups of 50 to 100 people who hunted, fished and gathered in the area. The bison were an important part of their lives, as was mentioned previously, and bison skulls and remains have been found on land when it is being cleared.

The original settlement was founded

Edison Post Office 1913

Westlock 1925

KLONDIKE TRAILS

The Klondike Trail covered serveral trails and started from Fort Edmonton and headed towards the Yukon. One such trail meandered through the bush following the high land along the east side of Lac La Nonne, crossing the Pembina River near Belvedere, winding northeast of Barrhead and on to Fort Assiniboine. This trail became known as Chalmers Trail. It was upgraded in 1824 by a man named Cardinal. Governor George Simpson made a deal with him to cut a horse trail from Edmonton to Fort Assiniboine. During the gold rush an est. 775 people set out from Edmonton on this trail towards the Yukon gold fields. Chambers started in January and had, by spring of 1898, actually cut a trail most of the way to Lesser Slave Lake, finishing at the end of July. Chalmers men had upgraded to a wider trail of 10' to 16' wide, and ran east for a few miles then struck off north until it crossed Deep Creek near Timeu. They headed northwest towards Deer Mountain (about halfway between Fort Assiniboine and Lesser Slave Lake). Here a sign read: *"Due North, Dawson City, starvation and death. Due south, Home Sweet home, and a warm bed."*

Westlock 1925

in 1902, five kilometres to the east of present-day Westlock. Four Edgerson brothers built a stopping place there, and that stopping place formed the basis of a community for settlers from eastern Canada, the United States and Europe. The community was going to be named Edgson but misspellings in the mail led them to change it to Edison was chosen in honour of Thomas Edison.

By 1912, the community had grown to have 13 buildings, including a harness shop, a blacksmith shop, many homes, two churches and even one family living in a tent while they waited for their home to be built. The post office had closed the previous year due to cutbacks but in the year that the post office closed, the railway was approaching from the east.

In 1911 the railway reached nearby Clyde to the east, and in 1912 the E.D. & B.C. Railway (later the Northern Alberta Railway, now part of CN) mapped a new townsite where Westlock now stands to the west. Edison was now caught between the two. The name of Westlock would come from the names of William Westgate and William Lockhart, who owned the property that the future town would sit on. The first four letters of each last name formed Westlock.

In 1914, the Methodist church building was picked up and moved down the road to Westlock, an indication of the new settlement's ascendancy over the older one.

Within a few years, Westlock was booming. On March 13, 1916, the hamlet became a village with a population of 65 residents. That same year, the first grain elevator would go up, a brick schoolhouse would be built and Westlock would grow in popularity among the rural residents of the area. In 1918, the first bank, the Merchant's Bank, was opened, and a permanent brick schoolhouse was built in 1926. In 1928, a hospital was opened out of a former house and a cenotaph for fallen soldiers was unveiled in 1934. On Jan. 7, 1947, Westlock became a town as its population reached 854 people.

While the area around Westlock is primarily agricultural, there is some oil & gas activity. The Town of Westlock is now home to over 5000 residents, a healthy retail and hospitality industry join farm implement dealerships, some small manufacturing and a Lafarge cement plant in the economic stability of the community. Westlock still retains its original purpose as a centre for the grain trade, as CN still accepts grains from the remaining grain elevators.

Rexall Drugs & Lindhal's South on Main

MANOLA - Hamlet in County of Barrhead

The Board of Railway Commissioners formally authorized the Pembina Valley Railway to link up with the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway (ED&BCR) at Busby via order number 37748 issued on June 16, 1926. The track reached the Pembina River crossing at mile 19 in the autumn of 1926. The construction department began to carry freight as far as Manola on January 15, 1927.

Manola

Town of Mayerthorpe

Mayerthorpe 1922

A civil engineer hailing from Indianapolis, Robert Ingersoll Mayer and his wife Emma began a homestead along the Little Paddle River, northwest of Edmonton in 1908. Mayer accepted a position to operate a post office near his homestead.

In 1909, the Canadian Northern Railway began laying track from Edmonton northwest to a proposed terminus in Grande Prairie. Construction was slow and completion of the line grew increasingly uncertain with the arrival of the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia railway line into Grande Prairie from the west. Nonetheless, several settlers optimistically claimed or purchased land along the anticipated route; among them was a US navy veteran, Leo Oscar Crockett who in 1919, subdivided part of his half section of land adjacent to the railroad into a small townsite. Crockett resisted the call to name the settlement "Crockett' and it was suggested that the new townsite, just five kms east of the Mayers' post office be officially named Mayerville, by Peter Gunn, Member of the Legislative Assembly (and for whom the hamlet of Gunn was named). When the name was rejected, Gunn kept the "Mayer" in honor of the first postmaster and added "thorpe' the old english word for village or hamlet; thus began the illustrious beginnings of Mayerthorpe, Alberta. Mayers' post office closed in 1921 and a new one opened in the townsite now known as Mayerthorpe. Robert Mayer moved to Edmonton in 1922 to work as a railway bridgman until his death in 1937. Crockett remained in the area, convinced that the "bush townsite" would someday become an official town.

Leo Crockett opened a general store on his farmsite, 10 miles northeast of Mayerthorpe. Along with a team of oxen, Crockett worked his land and hauled store supplies from Wabamun. The 120 mile round trip, took anywhere from five days to two weeks over the bush trails and corduroy muskeg.

True to his dream, and to help the small settlement grow, Crockett made a trip to Edmonton with the sole purpose to secure a bank for the area. He convinced the manager of Merchant's Bank of Canada to erect a 12' x 16' bank, the first official building in the new townsite. Completed in the fall of 1919, the bank was quickly followed by Crockett's General Store, and a small hotel. As more settlers opened up the area, more businesses followed. 1920 saw the construction of Frontier Lumber Co. and the opening of a livery barn at the south end of town.

The influx of new settlers into the region after the First World War and the extension of the railway line to Whitecourt by the Canadian National Railway swelled the fledgling settlement's

Mayerthorpe 1947

NEERLANDIA - Hamlet in County of Barrhead

Neerlandia was founded by Dutch immigrants beginning in 1911. The name "Neerlandia" refers to the first settlers' country of origin, the Netherlands. The surrounding area is largely agricultural based with many people in the out-lying area also being involved in construction and other trades as well. In 1912, a group of Dutch immigrants living in Edmonton established the colony of Neerlandia, near Westlock, the province's only exclusively Dutch settlement.

Neerlandia 1937

population. In the 1920s, several grain elevators were constructed in Mayerthorpe to accommodate the region's burgeoning agricultural economy. The Alberta Wheat Pool (AWP) constructed its first elevator in the community in 1928, one year after Mayerthorpe was incorporated as a village in 1927 with 22 businesses.

As the province strengthened it's agricultural and farming operations, Mayerthorpe flourished. Crops were getting larger and farmers were able to harvest higher yields and by the 1930's three grain elevators stood tall and proud in the community. As the century drew to a close, wooden grain elevators began to deteriorate and became challenging to maintain. Concrete facilities were more efficient and could handle more grain. By the end of the century, one by one small community elevators closed down and in 1999 the last elevator in Mayerthorpe was slated for demolition. A local group formed the County Elevator Society to save the historical site and make it a museum.

Mayerthorpe continued to provide for it's citizens and the surrounding area; and in 1961 Leo Crockett's dream of seeing the settlement become an official town, came to fruition when the Town of Mayerthorpe was incorporated on March 30, 1961.

The community mourned the loss of it's founder in 1965 when Leo Oscar Crockett was laid to rest at the age of 81.

Tragedy shook the community and the nation on March 3, 2005 when four officers serving with the Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt detachments of the

Mayerthorpe 1938

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) were killed in a standoff just outside the town's corporate limits. A heartfelt memorial was erected to honour the four officers and now welcomes visitors from around the world.

In 2008 the Mayerthorpe Arena was destroyed by fire. Three years of planning and fundraising, the arena's replacement was officially opened and the community celebrated the new Mayerthorpe Exhibition Centre.

In 2016, following a string of suspicious fires in the area, the community watched in horror as the nearby Rochfort bridge burned in an act of arson, taking out the 100 year old structure and crippling the railway system in the area. The bridge was rebuilt in 20 days.

Though the history of Mayerthorpe is long and filled with tragedy, the small community in central Alberta remains in the hearts of its residents, past and present and with all who visit its splendor and beauty.

Mayerthorpe 1960s

ONOWAY - Town in Lac Ste. Anne County

Settlement in the Onoway area began in the late 1890s by Europeans who migrated to Canada because of the federal government promise of free land. Onoway continued to grow and on June 2, 1923 was formally established as a village (25 occupied dwellings and a population of 100 people). By 2000 the school population in Onoway was approximately 1,000 but it took until 2005 for the Village of Onoway to reach a population of 1,000 and consequently, town status.

Onoway 1956

County of Barrhead

The present County of Barrhead has been made up of many local improvement districts and municipalities. Prior to the formation of a local government, the area from Dunstable to Fort Assiniboine was served by two main access roads from Edmonton. The two roads leading out of Edmonton were the Athabasca Trail heading northeast and the Klondike Trail heading northwest -- used by the gold prospectors in 1898.

Settlement of the County of Barrhead took place along the main access points created by the Klondike Trail and spread out to remote areas as settlers and farmers moved into the area. The majority of settlers were from Britain and the U.S.

In the early 1900's, the supply hub for the county was the City of Edmonton, eighty miles southeast. As the area developed, supply hubs popped up in Morinville, Sangudo, and Onoway. In 1927, the Northern Alberta Railway built the Pembina Valley Railway to Barrhead. The area was heavily timbered and numerous sawmill operations were established. The county struggled with establishing roads to serve all this industrial activity.

The periodic flooding of the Pembina and Paddle Rivers took their toll on local roads and bridges, as they still do today. The demand for better roads led to the formation of the first Local Improvement District in May 1910. The first elected authority was struck -- ID No. 30-B-5 named the Paddle River LID.

The Local Improvement Districts around Barrhead and Westlock continued to be redefined until 1955, when an order-in- council by the Provincial Government designated two municipalities:

Barrhead No. 106 and Westlock No. 92!

The Barrhead M.D. was formed from part of Lac Ste. Anne, part of Westlock and parts of Local Improvement District 107. The first Council for the MD of Barrhead was elected in March of 1955. The municipality continued to function until 1958, when permission was received from Municipal Affairs for the formation of a

Albert Teimstra's School Bus 1950

County type of Government.

The County of Barrhead came into existence!

The formation of a county also called for the amalgamation of school and municipal administrations. The school division administration building also became the headquarters of the County.

In January 1995, the Pembina Hills Regional Division No. 7 was incorporated, separating education administration from the County. A new organizational structure was needed following the separation from the educational administration; staff reductions and the division of assets ensued and the County of Barrhead was able to concentrate on the municipality.
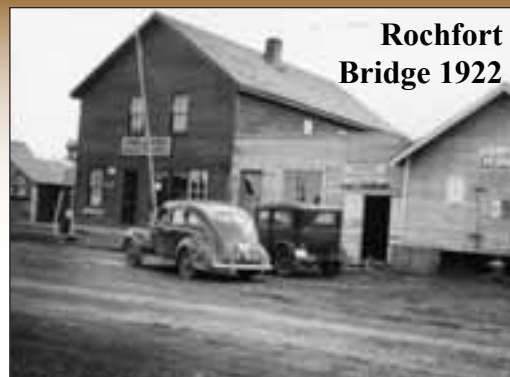

Threshing, early 1920's

Belvedere Bridge over the Pembina River

RICH VALLEY
- Hamlet in Lac Ste. Anne County

Rich Valley, originally called "Onion Prairie", is located on hwy 33, approx 70 kms northwest of Edmonton.

The first post office was established in the home of the Carlin family in 1909.

Rochfort Bridge 1922

ROCHFORT BRIDGE
- Hamlet in Lac Ste. Anne County

Located approximately 8 kms east of Mayerthorpe. Rochfort Bridge is named for Cooper (Cowper) Rochfort, who with his associate, Percy Michaelson, homesteaded on the Paddle River at the point where the old trail from Lac Ste. Anne to the MacLeod River crossed the Paddle River.

Alberta's Garden: A Protected Historic Resource
George Pegg's Botanic Garden

George Pegg's father, Fred, among the fruit trees planted on the Pegg family homestead, circa 1930s. Some of these trees can still be seen today at the George Pegg Botanic Garden.

Much like Alberta's foremost egg collector, Archie Henderson, pioneer botanist and taxonomist George Pegg saw much more than just the crops at his homestead. An entire world of living creatures existed to the patient eye. George's observations of the area's birds and cultivation of its plants left a lasting legacy on our province; a massive pressed plant collection, theoretical contributions to the field of botany, many first-time-in-Alberta findings of certain species, and the founding of a unique garden that continues to draw visitors to this day.

The Pegg family originated in Toronto and moved to Red Deer in 1911 when George was one year old. Crop failure pushed the family to move again, finally settling on an abandoned quarter lot at Glenevis. George and his siblings grew up playing outdoors and wandering through the nature surrounding their home, developing a strong affinity for the flourishing life in the area. George's father was also the first person who grew alfalfa near Glenevis, imparting a keen interest in agriculture culture in his son.

At the beginning of June, George and his brothers would go out on a bird count, a supplement to their records on bird migrations and their notes from a taxidermy course they took through correspondence.

As a young adult, George set out across Canada and the U.S. looking for work, while always keeping records of birds and plants he saw. Returning to Alberta, he continued his family's work of noting the species and migrations of all birds they sighted, eventually accounting for 180 different avian varieties. At the same time, he collected plant specimens, pressing them for his records and then trying to identify the species with the help of his library. However, some specimens eluded him; these he would bring to the University of Alberta, where he worked with Dr. Moss to match his findings with the taxonomic record. As a result of this work, the known ranges of more than 50 species were expanded and over 100 species were added to the known flora of his home province. George was even able to identify areas of west and central Alberta that had escaped the glacial scrubbing and extinction of plant life caused by the last ice age.

Ultimately, the homestead which now houses the botanical garden was George's home for almost seven decades. George Pegg Botanic Garden Society now operates the site, preserving the legacy of his work.

The George Pegg Botanic Garden Society preserves and maintains the historical Pegg site for the enjoyment of present and future generations. For more information go to: http://www.pegggarden.org

ROCHFORT TRESTLE near Mayerthorpe

One of North America's longest wooden train trestles is located just east of the hamlet of Rochfort Bridge, which crosses over the Paddle River valley and Highway 43. The bridge, 2,414ft long, and 110ft tall; was built in 1914 by Canadian National Railway (CN). A short section had been replaced with steel in 1936. A fire in November 1956 destroyed 200 feet of the trestle with another 500 feet of its length was heavily damaged. Crews worked around the clock to rebuild the damaged bridge and service was restored within 2 weeks.

A devastating fire on April 26, 2016 completely engulfed the historic landmark following a string of arsons. CN crews worked 20 days straight and the new bridge was completed on May 15, 2016. About 190,000 metric tons of steel, concrete and fill was used to create part of the new bridge. The new bridge is 292 feet longer than the old one.

Town of Swan Hills

According to an old Indian legend, the Swan Hills in north central Alberta were home to huge thunderbirds who dwelled in the vast recesses of the 10,000 square miles of wilderness. No one has ever seen them, but during the heavy thunderstorms that frequent the hills in summer, the birds may be heard flapping their mighty wings as they seek shelter.

The mysteries of the Swan Hills lay in complete darkness until gold was discovered in the Yukon territory in 1896, setting off the greatest gold rush in history. In 1897, an overland route to the Yukon was surveyed by territorial road engineer T. W. Chalmers from Fort Assiniboine north to Lesser Slave Lake. Traversing the highest point in the Swan Hills, Chalmers and a road-cutting crew cut 240 miles from Pruden's Crossing on the Athabasca River near Fort Assiniboine, through thick, heavy brush; skirted the present site of Swan Hills before following the Swan River north to what is now known as Kinuso. The Swan Hills proved a challenge for Chalmers and the prospectors who followed his overland trail, which turned around many gold seekers. By 1901-02 the trail declined and was soon abandoned in favour of less challenging routes to the Peace River area.

Having bested all who dared enter, the Swan Hills once again fell into darkness.

Fast-forward 10 years and the Swan Hills once again became a light in history. The geographical barrier of the hill and forests separated the southern half of the province from the fertile but still virgin Prairies to the north. To the land hungry homesteaders whose eyes were focused on the Peace River country, this hostile territory was a serious stumbling block. Finally, the Alberta government was prevailed upon to send men to open a wagon road through the wilderness. They felled trees, cleared deadfalls and built wooden bridges where needed. By 1911, the ill-famed Edson rail was declared open for travel.

Many of the old-timers who travelled over the Edson Trail recall it bitterly as the "trail of bears and curses". They talk of Breakneck Hill and Jacob's Ladder, of Dead Man's Swamp and stretches of muskeg that periodically swallowed the corduroy roads.

Heart-breaking toil necessitated by countless loadings and un-loadings of wagons heaped high with household furnishings and homesteader's tools, broke many a man's health and spirit. Sturdy horses fell by the way, windbroke. Sand fleas and mosquitoes plagued them in the summer and deep snows in winter. Starvation faced them daily, for there were no stopping-places along the way. By 1916 the pioneers were more than willing to abandon the trail. Within a year or two, nature obliterated a goodly portion of man's effort to conquer it. New growth, fresh windfalls and wooden bridges washed away by fierce mountain streams in spring, spelled the end to an unhappy era.

For the next several decades, the Swan Hills played the unwilling host to a few native trappers and a number of lumbermen whose logging trails probed tentatively into the timbered areas. The rest of the region remained as secretly alien as ever.

But the Peace River homesteaders who had succeeded in establishing themselves were now harvesting crops and raising marketable cattle, were once more raising their voices. Their's was an urgent need for market roads. By 1916 the E.D. and B.C. railroad was snaking erratically towards its goal in the Peace. Several years later, the government built Highway No. 2 closely following the original Athabasca Trail. But the settlers were

Logging the "new townsite" 1959

SANGUDO - Hamlet in Lac Ste. Anne County

Sangudo, a village northwest of Lac Ste. Anne, was named by submissions of residents in 1912; possibly after two American towns, Santa and Gudo. Sangudo was formerly incorporated as a village on April 12, 1937, but dissolved and reverted to hamlet status effective Sept. 16, 2007. Its sister village is Bukovina nad Labem, Czech Republic.

SANGUDO 1922

The ill-fated highway from Fort Assiniboine to Swan Hills in the early 60's made much needed supply runs from Edmonton to Swan Hills a daunting task. One supply run taking 80 hours to make the 320 mile journey. This caravan from Fort Assiniboine took 36 hours to reach Swan Hills. Today the trip takes less than 30 minutes.

oil prosperity that it has enjoyed ever since.

The race was on.

In 1959, the oil company Amoco Canada, together with British American (Gulf) helped make history by striking the first well of the South Swan Hills Unit. By the time the field's boundaries were defined in 1963, the South Swan Hills Unit encompassed 100 square miles, had a capacity of producing 831 million barrels of oil and had 193 working wells.

There's nothing like an oil boom to help build a town, and like so many other Alberta communities that owe their existence and prosperity to oil, Swan Hills is no different. During the years of the oil boom, the base camp that had been set up for the workers quickly exploded into a town site as homes, schools and recreational facilities were put in for the oil companies' employees.

Casually nicknamed 'Oil Hills', the town's official name was taken from the area of densely forested uplands in which it is located, although 'Chalmers' was also considered, after T.W. Chalmers, who had surveyed and cut the Klondike Trail through the area.

The New Town of Swan Hills was incorporated on September 1, 1959. Twenty-four parcels of industrial land were sold at the first land auction in November 1959. The first all-weather road into the area was completed in 1960, replacing the treacherous forestry road connecting Swan Hills to Fort Assiniboine. The "New Town of Swan Hills" was officially opened by Premier Ernest Manning in June 1962.

On January 1, 1967, Swan Hills again took a place in history by becoming the first township incorporated during Canada's centennial year.

Situated within dense borel forest, Swan Hills has been evacuated at least five times as wildfires threatened the town: 1972, 1981 and 1983, and twice in May 1998, when the Virginia Hills Fire came close. The town has since implemented a FireSmart program, reducing fire fuel within and around the town's perimeter.

Swan Hills' wilderness setting makes it a popular year-round destination for nature enthusiasts and outdoor sports including camping, hunting, fishing, trapping and ATV riding. Above average snowfall, hundreds of miles of groomed snowmobile trails and breathtaking scenery, Swan Hills, Alberta is the perfect wilderness playground for snowmobilers and outdoor enthusiasts.

still dissatisfied. The crying need was for the shortest route to market - and that meant a good, all weather road through the Swan Hills.

Finally in the mid-50's, the construction of the Whitecourt-Valleyview cut-off was started. This in turn triggered a chain of events that shook the whole province and brought the Swan Hills' term of isolation to an abrupt end.

In September, 1956, a foreman with Home Oil named Fred Willock set out along the new road to prospect for oil in the area; only one of many oil prospectors who converged on the area, sending down their well shafts in the hope of striking it rich.

Willock did! In the spring, he helped drill the well that brought in the Swan Hills field; which became the third largest oil discovery in Canada (containing an estimated four billion barrels of oil), and helped to propel Alberta into the decades of

Early rig site.

VEGA (KLONDYKE) FERRY
- 8 km west of Vega along Hwy 661 in Barrhead County

Just outside of Fort Assiniboine is the Vega (Klondyke) Ferry connecting hwy 661 over the Athabasca River. The original ferry was constructed of spruce planking and began operation in 1932 carting 8,751 autos, 7 tractors, 29,145 passengers, 499 animals and 686 saddle horses the first year. The first cable crossing was in 1939, later years a cage was added to an overhead cable for transporting passengers across the river. A new ferry was built in 1983, the free-cable ferry can carry 13 mid-sized cars and 50 passengers over the 230-metre crossing. The Klondyke Ferry was the largest built and the first to have all steel construction in Alberta. Of the 80+ ferries operating in Alberta in the early days of the province, 6 remain in operation.

Lac Ste. Anne County

This was part of the area known as Rupert's Land, which the government of Canada acquired from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1870. The land was surveyed for settlement, and settlers poured in from all over.

The County is named after Lac Ste. Anne Lake, a large lake in the mid-east part of the county. Prior to European settlement the area was inhabited by the Nakota Sioux and Cree First Nation's People. The County has a strong indigenous tradition, and the Alexis First Nations Reserve is located in the centre of the County in the present day.

It began to be inhabited by European settlers in the mid-19th Century. The village of Lac Ste. Anne Mission was one of the first settled areas in Alberta, after being established by the Lac Ste. Mission. The Mission grew quickly, and at one point was a larger trading post than Fort Edmonton.

The major catalyst for the next phase of development in the region was the construction of the railroad through the county, which led to intensified agricultural operations and greater access. It also led to growth of areas around Lac Ste. Anne Lake as tourist destinations. The development of Highway 43 in the first half of the 20th century further reinforced the infrastructural spine of the County and led to the growth of the main Towns and Villages.

Through the amalgamation of numerous smaller municipalities, the Municipal District of Lac Ste. Anne was formed in 1944. The Municipal District was declared a County in 1965. The County has a strong and diverse local culture. Agriculture, lakes and recreational areas are core features in establishing the unique identity of the county. In addition to the already established local population, the county is also proving to be an increasingly popular location for new residents, particularly those relocating from the Edmonton area, in search of an affordable rural lifestyle in close proximity to Edmonton and Spruce Grove.

Agriculture and related industry has traditionally formed the core economic activity within the county. This has, however, been supplemented in recent years with a stronger recreational sector, aggregate extraction industry, and general industrial development.

Woodlands County

Woodlands County is a rural municipality approximately 150 kilometers northwest of Edmonton, Alberta. With an area of 7,668 square kilometers, the county surrounds the Town of Whitecourt, and includes the hamlets of Blue Ridge, Goose Lake and Fort Assiniboine. With a population of over 4,600 people, Woodlands County is a thriving natural playground, welcoming families, businesses and tourists alike to experience and enjoy all there is to offer.

Areas within Woodlands County have played important roles regarding the early development of Alberta and Western Canada.

The hamlet of Fort Assiniboine was once used as transportation and supply point during the Hudson's Bay era between 1823 and 1877. To commemorate the early history of the region, a Hudson's Bay-style museum was constructed on Oct. 4, 1980 that reflects the fur trade and also houses historical artifacts. These buildings are now referred to as the Fort Assiniboine Museum and Friendship Club Drop-in Centre. Today, the museum is a very popular tourist attraction.

Another important piece of history that passes through Woodlands County is part of the famous Klondike Trail. The gold rush seekers camped at Klondike City (about 16 kilometres north of Fort Assiniboine) in the winter of 1898 and 1899. During the Klondike Gold Rush, the Northwest Territories government dispatched T.W. Chalmers to cut a trail from Klondike City to Lessor Slave Lake. This trail was used during the 1897 and 1898 Klondike Gold Rush and was promoted by the Edmonton Bulletin, Edmonton merchants, and the Government of Canada, as an "all-Canadian route to the easy gold of the Yukon."

Today, the Chalmers portion of the Klondike Trail is being mapped and preserved by The Klondike Trail Society. The Klondike Trail Society is a group of Fort Assiniboine residents who are interested in locating, mapping, and marking the first 250 miles of the trail from Edmonton, AB to Dawson City, YK.

Woodlands County is a diverse and growing community now. Many forestry and petroleum companies have important partnerships within the community and contribute to the local economy.

WOLF KING OF ALBERTA

Knick named the "halfway cabin, Trapper George W. Leas built his home cabin in the Swan Hills in 1943; a smaller storage/trapping cabin was built in 1938 as Leas established his trap line and later, Leas added a barn. For 14 years, the simple life of a trapper served Leas well and he became known as "Alberta's Wolf King" having trapped the largest number of wolves. The barn was burned down when the government extended the highway to Fort Assiniboine in 1959. In 1977, the Swan Hills Chamber of Commerce undertook the site as a community project, and spent the next four years restoring both of the cabins. Time and the elements have taken their toll on the two cabins. Due to safety issues, one cabin was dismantled and the second is scheduled for demolition in the very near future

Special Thanks and Dedication

We hope you have enjoyed this presentation of our region's history.

It is with Special Thanks, we dedicate this *historical journey to:*

Marvin Polis, Stimulant Strategies. *Marvin Polis is the freelance producer and host of the WILD Alberta podcast series on behalf of GROWTH Alberta. He has been a professional media producer and communication consultant for more than 40 years in Canada and internationally, working for companies such as TELUS, ATB Financial, Shell and Lafarge. Marvin was assisted in the WILD Alberta podcast project by Zach Polis (his son and employee). Marvin is no stranger to the GROWTH Alberta region. His grandparents raised their family in Dapp, Alberta and that's where Marvin's father grew up. As a child, Marvin spent so much time around Dapp, Westlock and Barrhead that he's practically an honorary resident of the area. His best memories were fishing, camping, snowmobiling and baseball throughout the region – including attending hockey school in Westlock under the tutelage of his uncle, Greg Polis, the former Pittsburgh Penguins all-star. More recently, Marvin produced more than 100 business videos for GROWTH Alberta over a 10 year period. The WILD Alberta podcast series has been a labour of love.*

Andrew Seal, Director of Communications, EWI Works Inc. *Western Canada's leading ergonomics and wellness company. Andrew's experience as a researcher and writer stems from his background in journalism. You can find his published work in BBC, The Globe and Mail, HuffPost, CBC, The Tyee, and more.*

Walter Preugschas (County of Barrhead) *It was Walter who brought the idea of documenting and producing a historical record of the GROWTH/WILD Alberta region.*

Troy Grainger former Executive Director of GROWTH Alberta. *Troy secured the funding, sourced consultants and producers and provided resources needed for this publication. Troy managed GROWTH Alberta for over 15 years, ensuring the Regional Economic Development Alliance's (REDA) continued success within the region.*

Carol Webster, Publisher/Owner, Grizzly Gazette (1990) Inc. *Carol spent many, many hours scouring history books, historical documents and historical websites to gather stories and photos for this publication. A 3rd generation Swan Hillian, Carol continues to work in and for her beloved community as the Publisher of the local Grizzly Gazette and a long-time volunteer in Swan Hills.*

Fort Assiniboine Museum and Ed Graham, Doug Borg

Collette Arcand, Alexander Industry Relations Corp.

Barry Mustus

Glen Lundeen, www.prairie-towns.com for permission to use many of the photos presented in this publication.

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LESSER   SLAVE   FOREST