

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Medicine Hat and District Newsletter

Co-Op Neon Sign, ca. 1970



Interim/Acting President's Message

Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

Next Meeting:

January 26, 2023
@7pm, Esplanade Studio Theatre
Show and Tell Event

Greetings all...and a Happy New Year!

We bid farewell to Past President, Wes Krause, with thanks for his dedicated service through some difficult years, as well as to Barbara Watson, who has been with us providing valued membership and newsletter services – which are now being ably handled by Lynne Rance and Jenni Barrientos respectively, with much appreciation.

Regarding our General Program meeting format, just a note to mention that we will continue to have the business portion of the meetings held *after* the program portion at members' request, allowing those with less interest to leave early. The business portion will be minuted in order to keep a record of the proceeds for future reference.

Just a reminder that we will be voting on a revised budget at our January 26 General Program meeting to accommodate very worthy funding requests from Lorine Marshall (\$2,000 for a new oral/video history project – “Then and Now”) and from Jenni Barrientos (\$3,385 for a book entitled “Saratoga Park in Medicine Hat”). Both projects have received Board approval.

The annual Christmas Dinner held on December 15 at the Paradise Valley Golf Course was again, a great success – many thanks from us all to Judy Morris for a job well done!

And finally, we hope to see you all at on January 26, with the program to be a “Show-and-Tell in Memory of Allan Jensen”.

There will be further information on this later in this newsletter.

Cheers,

Tom Hamp

Acting/Interim President
Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

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Historical Society Upcoming Program

Show and Tell Night: In Memory of Allan Jensen

R.B Shepard

Allan Jensen was a long-time member, including as a Past President (1985-1989; 2006-2011) of our organization who, among many other activities, arranged the programs for our evening events. One of his personal favourites was the Show and Tell Night where members are asked to bring their personal and family treasures and heirlooms, and to relay the stories which go with them. Allan's untimely passing shocked most of us and we would like to honour his memory by reviving the Show and Tell Night.

Members are cordially invited to bring their treasures and heirlooms, and the stories which go with them, to our next gathering on Thursday, January 26, 2023 at 7:00 PM in the Studio Theatre of the Esplanade. Bring family and friends, if you like. You will be able to renew your membership, or encourage your friends to join us and learn about some of the memorable items which exist in our community.

As the new Program Coordinator of the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District, I have no illusions that I will ever be able to replace Allan's interest, commitment or dedication to the work of our Society. With your help, we can continue to explore the past which makes this part of our country such an interesting place to live. Please also bring your ideas and suggestions for future programs and we will see what can be arranged.



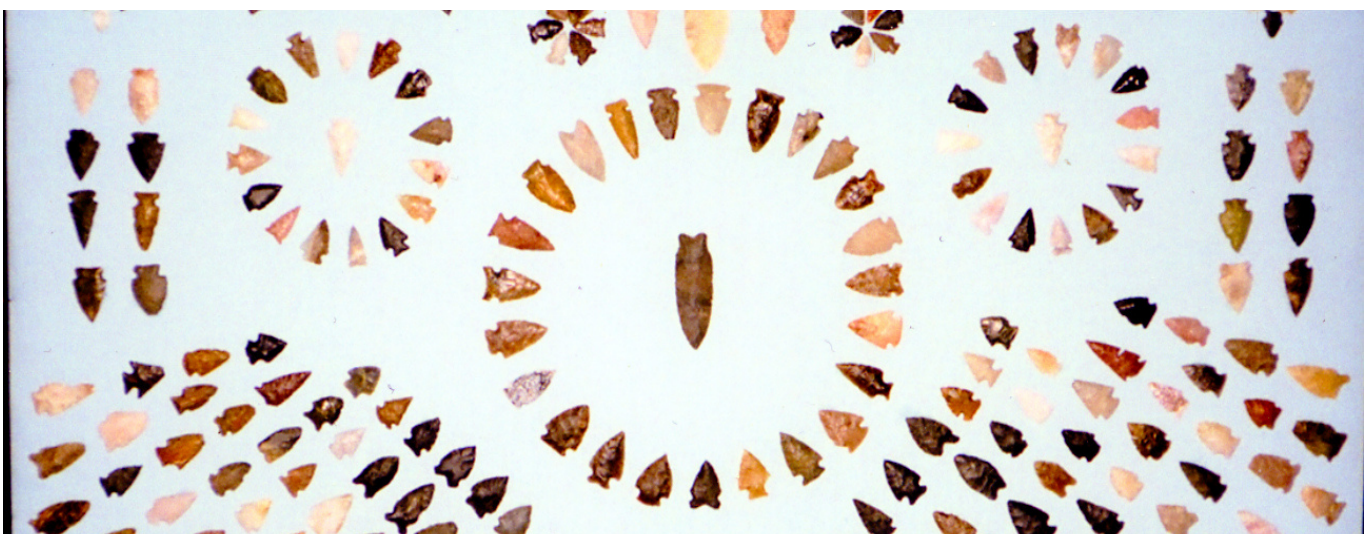
Allan Jensen, ca. 1987

Credit: Esplanade Archives
0527.0392

All the Best,

R.B Shepard

Program Coordinator, Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District



A selection of arrowheads brought to the Show and Tell event, ca. 2016

Credit: Submitted Photograph, Allan Jensen

The Buzz about Lights

Neon Signs in Medicine Hat's Past

by J. Barrientos

There's honestly nothing more striking than the images we have of the neon signs from Medicine Hat in the past. The images are so unusual, as they are taken in the dark, in a time when nighttime photography was very rare. But in order to get the full view of a neon sign, it just had to be dark.

There are only a few vintage neon signs that are still around today; most notably the signs that still hum around the TransCanada Highway advertising hotels such as: The Satellite Hotel, the Bel-Aire hotel, the Rancho, the Hat Motel and the Ranchmen. The Assiniboia Inn also has a very large neon sign, though it has been many, many years since it was ever illuminated - it is a relic of the bygone days of the postwar era.

The technology behind neon signs -- trapping neon gas in a sealed tube -- was invented by the "The Edison of France", Georges Claude. Claude filed for a patent on his invention in 1910, and eventually found a way to market the invention by the creation of huge glowing signs for advertisements. Claude is credited with creating two large signs for car dealerships in Los Angeles, which caused a boom in popularity for neon signs. Yet Claude held onto the technology as a closely guarded secret, and it wasn't until Claude's patent expired in 1921 that neon signs dominated the advertisement landscape.

Being able to advertise in the dark, in colour, was a huge draw for businesses. Neon signs also were linked to Las Vegas and the glittery New York Times Square. And Medicine Hat wanted to echo that.



Esplanade Archives Image 1070.0203

circa. 1959

Neon Signs, con't

The Neon Nostalgia

by J. Barrientos

The full list of historic neon signs is truly too long to include. In the Archives, we have at least 50 images of neon signs in and around Medicine Hat, most of which were located in the downtown core. The sign featured to the right, of China Wonderland, was located on North Railway street, and would have cast a bright glow from across the railroad tracks to entice guests on the train and passenger lines.

Neon signs started to fall out of fashion in the late 1960s, as less expensive and simpler technologies took over the advertisement spaces.



Esplanade Archives

1070.0097

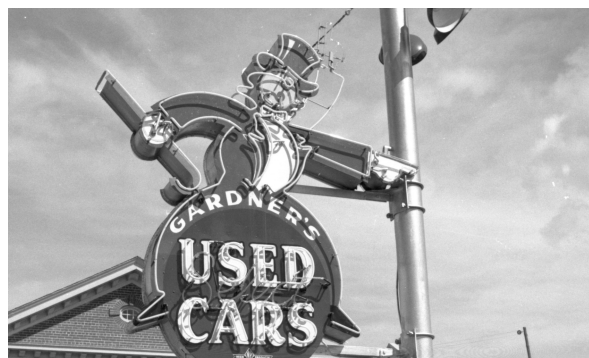
Neon signs were often expensive and difficult to make, and were a large investment for a business. As well, neon was not easy to acquire or import, so repair for a burnt or broken tube was no simple fix. Though if properly cared for, neon tubes can last decades, repair due to damage was often costly. Only two companies, neither of which were local - National Neon Ltd. or Neon Products Canada Ltd. - were known to be able to provide service, so competition was fierce.

Businesses started to turn towards less expensive options, and neon became synonymous with a bygone era. Neon signs still bring forward a feeling of nostalgia, not only with their colourful glow but also with their gentle hum in the background of many a diner visit. Many hatters will remember our iconic neon "Welcome to Medicine Hat" sign, pictured to the left, the fate of which, remains unknown. It, like many neon signs, were removed and replaced, and only live on as a lighted buzz of memory.



1070.0145

Esplanade Archives



1070.0145

ca. 1959

The indelible Ted Grimm

Mayor, council member and entrepreneur

by J. Barrientos

Ted Grimm's family history begins in Russia. His grandparents emigrated from Baden, Kherson, Russia to Canada in 1902 and settled in Qu'Appelle, Northwest Territories (now Saskatchewan). The Grimm family moved again between 1909 and 1911 and settled in North Dakota to live among the Germans from Russia who had settled the region in the late 1880's. Not finding much prosperity, the family moved back to Canada in 1911 and took up a homestead in the Leader area of Saskatchewan. In 1936, the family moved to Fox Valley and in 1943 or 1944, settled in Medicine Hat. Ted Grimm was born in the rural municipality of Happyland, SK, and had three brothers and a sister.

Ted, left Fox Valley in 1951 to take his Grade 12 and first year university at Campion, a Jesuit College in Regina. Ted came to Medicine Hat in 1956, at aged 20, to work at Northwest Nitro Chemicals (Western Co-Op and now CF Industries) where he became involved in the trade union movement. He then went to the University of Calgary and obtained his teaching degree and returned to Medicine Hat. During this time Ted had married Ruth Light and had four children, Lynda, Douglas, Maureen and Michelle.

While Ted taught, he also began to get involved in local politics. He was elected as an alderman from 1968-1974, as mayor from 1974-1977 and, again, as Mayor, from 1980-2001. During the intervening time out of office, Ted was a realtor but gave up his licence when he was re-elected in 1980. He ran for mayor again in 2007 but was unsuccessful in his attempt. He was the City of Medicine Hat's longest serving mayor, and one of the longest serving mayors in Alberta's history.

Ted was well-known in the community as a supporter of history and the arts. He passed away December 10, 2022 at the age of 86. He was a former member of our Historical Society, and oversaw such iconic Medicine Hat projects such as: the opening of the Veiner Center, building of the Maple Avenue Bridge, the turning of the sod for the TransCanada Highway development, opening of the Crestwood Kinplex, and additions to the Medicine Hat Museum, to name a few. He will be deeply missed, and remembered for his contributions to preserve and celebrate our local history.



Sod turning ceremony for the renovation and expansion of the Medicine Hat Museum. Ted Grimm, centre. 1987.

Membership Dues

Join the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District

Membership dues for 2022-2023 are now past due.

Your \$10 membership to the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District allows you to cast your vote on deciding factors at our meetings, as well as receive 5 editions of our Historical Society Newsletter via email or printed copy. *If you do not remain up to date, this might be the last copy of the Newsletter you receive!* You can pay your \$10 membership dues by cheque by mail to the address below. Please make cheques payable to:

The Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District

401 1 Street SE
 Medicine Hat, AB
 T1A 8W2

This day in History

December 18, 1992

Considering the exciting holiday gift-buying season has just passed, you can check out this 1992 advertisement for an IBM Computer that ran in the Medicine Hat News. Complete with 2MB of RAM (memory) and a DOS operating system, it cost what would be over \$2000 in today's (2022) dollars.

2MB of memory, if you're interested to know, would mean you were only able to save the picture of the Gardener's Used Cars neon sign on page 4 of this newsletter, and nothing more - as that digital image is 2MB on its own. What a difference 30 years makes!



Word of Thanks

The Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District partners with the Esplanade Archives in preserving and promoting our rich heritage. The Archives are a valuable resource for family research and local historical information. To make an appointment at the Archives, please call 403-502-8582, or email Jennifer Barrientos at jenuatr@medicinehat.ca. The Archives are located at 401 1 Street SE, Medicine Hat, AB T1A 8W2, and as always, are free for you to use.

The Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District website: www.histsocmedhat.ca

Executives

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Tom Hamp | Interim President |
| Wes Krause | Past President |
| Nick Martin | 1st Vice President |
| Earl Morris | 2nd Vice President |
| Leahandra Peterson | Secretary |
| Judy Morris | Treasurer |

Board of Directors

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Bruce Shepard | Programs |
| Sheila Tiegs | Book Sales |
| Jenni Barrientos | Newsletter Editor |
| Lynn Rance | Membership |
| Don Weiss | Director-At-Large |