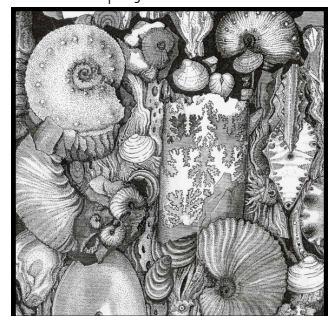
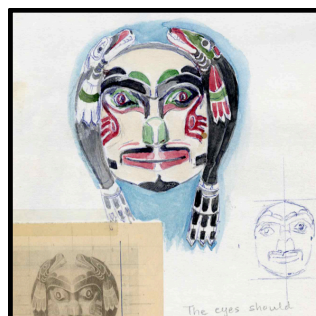
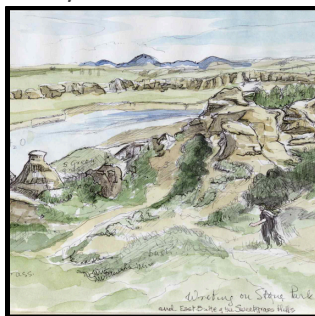
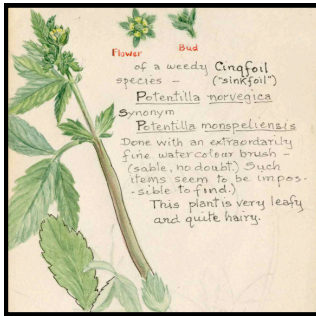


HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Medicine Hat and District Newsletter

Hope Johnson's Sketches



M2001.03.07

President's Message

Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

Next Meeting:

January 15, 2025

@7pm, Esplanade Studio Theatre

Did everyone have a wonderful holiday season? My family and I certainly did, despite some weather and car trouble getting to Regina to visit family. Things balance out, and I received several history books as presents; and which made the travel worthwhile.

Your Board of Directors met prior to the holidays and as your President, I reported on a presentation which I gave to the Probus Club, a senior's social group, on our activities. I reported on our arrangement with Medalta re: the sale of the remaining Altaglass inventory and the display which they had set up at their Christmas Market. It was a wonderful display and hopefully assisted with sales.

Our Treasurer provided a report on our finances and we are still in good shape. We have received several inquiries regarding financial assistance. We revised our Grant Application Form and sent it to the inquiring parties. We will evaluate, keeping in mind finances and possible future needs. The Board may need to hold a Special Meeting to evaluate the Applications as there are provincial funding deadlines which the parties are also trying to meet.

Our recent advertising and promotion initiative is picking up steam. We are considering a new logo, designed by Jim Marshall, which would be a salute to our railroad heritage. Our Social Media campaign is getting attention as we are now linked with the Monarch Theatre and Cypress Club pages. We are now a Member of National Trust of Canada, which will provide us with information on initiatives across the country. We are also discussing with Medalta the need for more and better signage to identify the Historic Clay District for both newcomers and visitors to our community.

Your Board spent time discussing your Society taking a greater leadership role in the arts, culture and heritage communities in Medicine Hat. We have invited groups to our upcoming "Show and Tell" night and are hoping for a positive response. We discussed having a round table as our March program at which various groups could outline the opportunities for arts, culture and heritage as to how we could collaborate. As always, your input on these, and related issues, is welcome. Your Board wants to know how you feel about our direction as a society. Our heritage is a vital resource in our community and your opinions are critical elements in seeing it successfully developed. Please remember that our next Meeting will be at the Studio Theatre in the Esplanade to accommodate the collectors' displays on **Thursday, January 15th beginning at 7:00 PM.**

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Warmest Regards;
Bruce Shepard

Historical Society Upcoming Program

Allan Jensen Memorial Show and Tell Event

R.B Shepard

Allan Jensen was at one time the President of our Society and served for many years as the Programs Director. He was, amongst many things, a passionate collector and understood that, to one degree or another, we are all accumulators of one thing or another. He initiated an annual “show and tell” evening where our Society’s members, and their guests, could display some of their collections and explain a bit about their significance and why they collected them.

To honour his memory, and his years of service to our organization, we decided several years ago to continue the tradition. One of our members characterized it as the “Allan Jensen Memorial” evening, and the name caught on. It is an opportunity for people interested in our arts, culture and heritage to come together socially to share knowledge and information about a passion in their lives.

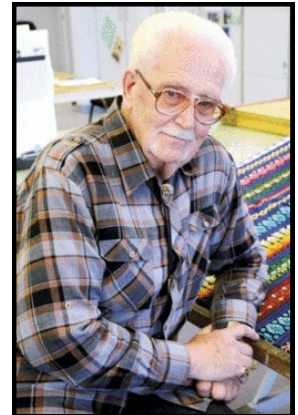
To accommodate the table displays which we are expecting, we will be moving back to the Studio Theatre at the Esplanade. We have ordered tables for the displays and round tables for conversation, both with table cloths. Those wishing to set up a display should please try to be there a few minutes early as we intend to begin at 7:00 PM.

We Hope to see you all there.

Warmest Regards;

R.B Shepard

Program Coordinator, Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District



Allan Jensen, 2013, when being recognized as a “Senior of Distinction”

Credit: Medicine Hat News File Photo



Arrowheads, from a past Historical Society Show and Tell Event, ca. 2015

Image Credit: Allan Jensen

The Ornithopter: Up, Up and... Away?

A Strange Medicine Hat Invention

by J. Barrientos

The “flapping bird” Ornithopter was invented by J.E. Caldwell and W.H. Francis around 1951, which was inspired by the ancient drawings of Leonardo da Vinci from 1485. Described as “the new science of air transportation” it included a seven-horsepower gasoline engine, which was an upgrade from the original two-horsepower engine in the first design. The principal of the craft was straight upward lift by two sets of flapping wings, and then to using gravity to glide forward by weight alone. There was no conventional propeller, rotor or blades on the machine, which earned it the nickname of the “flying bike”. The construction of the Ornithopter occurred at the Medicine Hat airport, from 1951-1954, and a full-size working model was created.



Esplanade Archives Image 0425.0015

Mr. Dick Northam, a licensed pilot, took the Ornithopter for its last, and best, test ride, where he was able to pilot the machine over 75 feet in the air, before coming heavily back to earth. News reports concluded that the machine came down “like a pancake” after the failed flight. Perhaps feeling the sting of defeat, the inventor J.E. Caldwell returned to Montreal, after spending almost all of his fortune on construction of the Ornithopter in Medicine Hat, and died while on a trip in Eastern Canada, attempting to secure funds to complete his project. A year later, in 1959, a South African artist-sculptor, Emiel Hartman debuted his man-powered aircraft, touted as the “world’s first” functioning Ornithopter, with no mention at all of Caldwell. Medicine Hatters will know the truth though, that the world’s first happened right here in a hangar at the Medicine Hat Airport, as strange as it might be!

Display Case



Long May They Reign: The 1939 Royal Visit

by J. Barrientos



Lorine Marshall has once again done a wonderful job with our Historical Society Display case. The topic this time is the Royal Visit of 1939 and highlights the important event of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (the Queen Mother) and their visit to Medicine Hat. The display case is available to view in the Lobby at the Esplanade; an excellent opportunity for your visit on January 15th for our upcoming Show and Tell event! If you are interested in your artefacts being a part of an upcoming display, please contact Lorine to discuss further.

David Mills: Interpretive History

The Story of a Local Black, Indigenous Interpreter

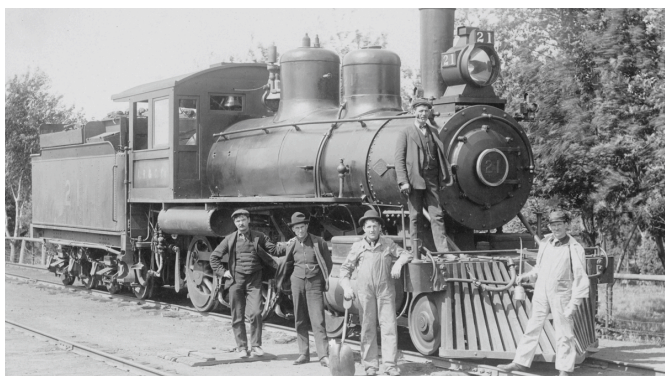
by J. Barrientos

Upcoming, the month of February is Black History Month, an important time to highlight the historical contributions that Black Canadians have made to our community. Henry Mills was born into slavery, and worked as an interpreter of Indigenous languages in the United States, and later, in the North West Territories, before the formation of Alberta as a province. Records obtained in the USA have indicated that half of his wages for his interpretation work in 1839 went to his master, Kenneth McKenzie.

While working near Fort Benton, in what is today Great Falls, Montana, Henry met a Kainai woman, Phillis (sometimes known as Phillisy) and they were married around 1854. They had a son, David Mills, who was born free April 13, 1855. David (or Dave) followed his father's footsteps and used his knowledge of his mother's traditional Kainai language, and his father's English to become an excellent skilled interpreter.



Dave Mills (left) and his wife, Holy Rabbit Woman (right). She is holding her child, Own Face. ca. 1900. Glenbow Image: NA-4035-160.



Train leased from the Alberta Railway and Coal Company and ran between Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Fort MacLeod. 1903. Archives Image: 0318.0119

David worked in the Medicine Hat area, especially during the 1885 Red River Resistance, when nationwide tensions between settlers and Indigenous groups were high. David spent time along the "Turkey Trot" line, which was a narrow gauge railway between Dunmore and Lethbridge used to move coal, working on the trains to ensure ease of passage of the railcars as they moved coal through Indigenous lands. The image at left shows an Alberta Railway and Coal Company locomotive on the track headed to Lethbridge and Fort MacLeod.

There is some evidence that David utilized hand-speak, a style of sign language as a part of his interpretation work. This is now categorized as a distinct language, often called Plains Indian Sign Language (PISL) or Plains Sign Talk. This assisted David as he moved through many different languages and dialects as his work as an interpreter. David passed away in 1918, after an acclaimed career including being an interpreter for, and present during, the signing of Treaty 7, of which comprises part of the land which Medicine Hat is situated on today.

Hope Johnson: Botanist, Artist, Historian

Johnson's Incredible Work Locally, and Provincially

by J. Barrientos

Barbara Elizabeth “Hope” Johnson (née Large) was born March 17, 1916, in Sardis, British Columbia. She was educated at St. Agatha’s School in Victoria and completed a year at Victoria College, then affiliated with the University of British Columbia. After a brief period working for the B.C. Department of Education, she joined the Canadian Army in 1941, serving at several postings across the country during the Second World War. Her final posting was with the Defence Research Board at Suffield, where she met and married Olafur Johnson, a meteorologist seconded to the armed forces, in 1946.

Following the war, the Johnsons made their home in Ralston, northwest of Medicine Hat, where they lived for 28 years before moving to Redcliff. Together they raised four children. During these years, Hope Johnson developed a distinguished reputation as a paleontologist, naturalist, and amateur botanist. A lifelong interest in plants led her to botany, and when drought conditions made plant collecting difficult, she turned her attention to fossil collecting. This work became a central focus of her life, and she donated significant fossil specimens to institutions including the National Museum of Natural Sciences, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Provincial Museum of Alberta, and the Medicine Hat Museum. She also supplied botanical specimens to universities and museums.

In addition to her scientific work, Johnson was an accomplished artist. Her drawings and paintings were exhibited in shows sponsored by the Canadian Nature Federation and the National Museums of Canada, and she was actively involved in the local art community as both an exhibitor and instructor. Her scientific illustrations appeared in *A Guide to Alberta Vertebrate Fossils from the Age of Dinosaurs* (1973), co-authored with Dr. J.E. Stoner, and she contributed to several other publications on fossils and plants.

Hope Johnson was deeply engaged in community life. She served as President of the Historical Society from 1976 to 1979 and was a trustee of the Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery for 14 years. She also co-authored *Down the Years at Elkwater* (1981), volunteered as a naturalist, and shared her knowledge widely through talks and mentorship. Her contributions were recognized with an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Lethbridge in 1981 and provincial recognition for her impact on Alberta society. She passed away in 2010.



Hope Johnson working on her artwork. Archives Image 0856.0040, dated ca. 1978.

Membership Dues

Join the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District

by Lynne Rance

Membership dues for 2025-2026 are now past due.

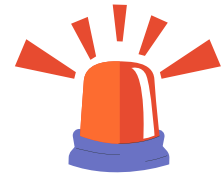
Your \$10 membership to the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District allows you to cast your vote on deciding factors at our meetings, as well as receive 5 editions of our Historical Society Newsletter via email or printed copy. As a reminder, our dues for 2025-2026 year are now almost 8 months overdue! 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

February 10, 1975



Have you heard the rumours of a secret underground tunnel in Medicine Hat? While the truth is a little less “sci-fi”, and a little more “cold war”, Medicine Hat did have something underground, and it was not far from the Esplanade. Below the old Post Office, there was a 200-bed overflow hospital, equipped with medical equipment in case of an emergency (such as a nuclear war!) The hospital was not a fallout shelter or bunker, but did include X-ray equipment and operating rooms including detailed instructions in case of emergency – which luckily, never came to fruition. The hospital below, and the old Post Office above, pictured here at the right, were demolished in 2003.



Archives Image 613B, dated February 10, 1975, of the old Post Office.

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 jenbar@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

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