

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Medicine Hat and District Newsletter

Silver and Black Fox Farm 0064.0034



Interim/Acting President's Message

Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

Next Meeting:

TBA - September, 2022

Location to be Announced

Despite a disappointing attendance to our AGM (barely making quorum, not unusual in AGM's), we did manage to report on the finances and activities of the Society, thanks to excellent reports by Past President – Wes Krause, and Treasurer – Judy Morris. The minutes were taken by myself and will be issued over the Summer as time allows.

The Society continues to struggle in attracting Board Executive, particularly for the President's position. You will note that I am listing myself, as I indicated during the vote, as Interim/Acting President, as, due to competing business, and possible relocation obligations, I am only reluctantly taking the role, as no-one else stood forth, and am able to commit to remaining President until end-January, 2023. In the intervening time, I will be exploring options for my replacement, including rotating presidencies and community advertising for Senior Executive. I will be looking to engage members of the business community in our Program Meetings in an effort to integrate the Society with the broader Medicine Hat community, and potentially as a source of Board Members – we are an aging group, and the need to refresh has indeed become urgent.

Key to the effort of reinvigorating the Society will be engaging the membership to return to Program Meetings. My concern is that personal habits and lingering concerns about COVID among our particular age-group may continue to discourage attendance, and that such small meeting attendance may not justify the effort to maintain the Society. Case in point: at the AGM, of the 19 members present, not counting Board Members, only 12 members-at-large were in attendance, despite repeated pleadings by Wes for attendance. Given a Board complement of 13 people, it seems unreasonable to have 13 Board Members serving possible future attendance of only 12 members-at-large.

In order to promote attendance, I am advocating - subject to Board Approval – a return to use of the Esplanade Studio Theatre, although possibly at a necessary cost to the Society. This venue remains – of the available locations I have reviewed - to uniquely offer the following attractants to attendance: sense of occasion, excellent socializing environment & members' familiarity with location. As well, the audio-visual facilities of the Studio Theatre offers flexibility for our new Program Director to pursue potential new directions in the conduct of our Program Meetings.

In this Issue

- President's Message · 1
- Message, con't · 2
- Fox & Fur Farming · 3
- Fox Farm, con't · 4
- Cenotaph Movement · 5
- Membership · 6
- Board of Directors · 6

Message, con't

We are fortunate that our former museum curator Bruce Shepard has accepted the position of Program Director. Bruce was trained as an historian and has over two decades of experience in museum work, including programming. He has been a member of our Society since moving to Medicine Hat and decided to retire here in part because of our community's sense of itself and its past.

New to the Board is Nick Martin as 1st Vice President. Although Nick has only just joined the Society, his willingness to stand forth for the position, as well as his energy and enthusiasm, stand him in good stead, and bode well for our future. For the meanwhile, Nick will be in learning mode about our Society governance and will be managing the use and disposition of the extensive videography equipment originally purchased for the Living History Project.

The addition of Jenni Barrientos to our board is also a great change. Jenni has been highly effective in creatively managing our newsletters, often generating new and excellent material. Her high energy, enthusiasm and sense of direction in recent meetings bode well for a freshening of our approach to managing the Society. You can expect to see some positive changes from her ideas. We are grateful, also, to Lynne Rance and Don Weiss for stepping forward to their Board positions. With that, the Board is complete - with the maximum complement - thanks to the excellent efforts of Wes Krause.

I will be working with Judy Morris over the coming months to update the budget, with a view to moving additional costs from Operating to Casino expenses. Several of our approved budget expenses will require AGLC applications (by myself, as time allows), which will require both time and patience on behalf of the recipients. These modifications and additions to the budget will also require board meetings throughout the summer prior to our approach to members for their approval at an Emergent/Special General Meeting in September.

While trying to maintain a positive tone to this message, I am only cautiously optimistic about the future of the Society, largely given the depressing response by members to attending the AGM. However, we do have a relatively strong board, notably and unavoidably excepting continuity at the senior executive level. Hopefully we can manage a transition to a fully robust board over the coming months.

Respectfully yours,

Tom Hamp

Acting/Interim President



Esplanade Archives, 2345-03

Fox Farming in Medicine Hat

The lucrative local fur business back in the day

by Lorine Marshall

During a recent visit to L. Eric Hansen at a local senior's lodge, he told me about his early days growing up on a fox farm near the Medicine Hat Airport. He said that his father, Hans Hansen was raising these animals on their ten acre farm and that his dad named the company the **Medicine Hat Silver Black Fox Ranching Co. Ltd.**

Eric also remembered that there was a mink farm in Medicine Hat that was just off of Gershaw Drive, near the corner of Seventh Street S.W., with rows and rows of pens that were used at the ten acre "farm."

Some of the family names in those early fur farming days in Medicine Hat were: Hansen, Lait, Fenrick, Maltin, Freedman and Levinson.

Eric said that his family never raised mink, but did explain how the Silver Black Fox were mated and eventually "pelted" in the pelting barn on their farm.

At mating time, the 80 females (vixens) were kept in their individual pens. The pens were joined together by tunnels that the males (dog fox) could move through on their rounds. After only fifty days, the baby (kits) would be born, each litter would number four to five kits.

Eric said that their animals were fed either ground fish, or ground horse meat, whichever his father could purchase the most easily.

The pelting had to be very carefully done, so that the skin was not damaged. The animal was carefully tapped on the skull and hung upside down by the feet on a special bar. Careful incisions were made, and the skin stripped off, all in one piece all the way down over the face.

Hans was the one doing that chore, and then selling the pelts on to other associates that would store and retail them to the furriers who made them into appropriate garments.

Eric mentioned that his family always had several horses on the farm, just north of the airport, and that he learned to ride bareback at an early age. The Hansens rented the horses out for 50 cents an hour, and people came out from town to ride around the nearby hills that overlook the South Saskatchewan River.

85.13.1

Courtesy of Esplanade Museum, silver fox stole



Fox Farming in Medicine Hat

Trail rides and fox farms

by Lorine Marshall

As a young man, Eric left Medicine Hat briefly in 1950 and was stationed in Korea to serve with the Canadian Army for two years. He said that Bill Rennie and Tony Demaris, two other local men, were in Korea at the same time that he was.

When Hansen returned from Korea to Medicine Hat, he and his wife, Marie (nee Gosselin) started their family. Two sons, George born in 1955 and William Earnest in 1956 were soon followed by two daughters, Jeanette in 1957 and Alice Emma in 1964.

Eric was rather modest when he told us about organizing two different trail rides that his young family was involved with. The first was in 1962, and started in East End, Sask. ending in Seven Persons, AB. 80 riders from several families took part. He said that they came up through Graburn Gap in Cypress Hills, camping in the sheltered places along the way. Reaching Medicine Hat, they camped at Buckland's Dairy near the Stampede Grounds in Crestwood, before carrying on to Seven Persons. Pete Mossey, from the Medicine Hat News went along and Ian Tyson and Allan Young were judges on the ride. Another year, Hansen organized a trail ride from Medicine Hat to the Calgary Stampede, camping out along the way again.



Image of Eric Hansen, 2022.

Submitted photo



0798.0092

Courtesy of Esplanade Archives (undated)

When I asked Eric what he and his wife did for fun, his face lit up and he began to reminisce about all of the Square dancing that was being led by Emil Schlenker and his wife, Jo. He said that their group travelled and danced and entertained all around this area.

Eric's memories of his early days in Medicine Hat were amazingly vivid and we concluded our visit when he glanced at his watch and said "I'd better go, it's supper time!"

I had only hoped to learn about the fox farm, but I learned much more about our community from Mr. Hansen. What a delightful, 89 year old man.

Lorine Marshall

And here, it Stays

The immovable, impassible, 100 year old cenotaph

by J. Barrientos

0899.0039

Esplanade Archives Image, dated 1922.



It's interesting, sometimes, how things come so full circle. For example, you may have heard around the town, a small bit of controversy about the Medicine Hat cenotaph, which is located in Riverside Veterans' Memorial Park. There was a note made to council, a few months ago, that due to recent development in the area, that permission was asked for the option to move the cenotaph, if needed.

Gratefully, on just this past Monday, council voted to designate the cenotaph (just after its 100th birthday) as a historical resource. As a part of that designation, and due to uproar about the option of it being moved from its home, the cenotaph will likely stay where it is for many more years to come.

Interestingly, this wasn't the first time that the issue of moving the cenotaph has come up. Back in the early 2000s, there was want for a new cultural centre. As a part of that process, many different areas were examined-- one being the land that is Riverside Veterans' Memorial Park.

To build it, the cenotaph would have had to be moved to a different location. As you can see, the rebuttal was quick and decisive. Hatters were dead set against the spot, for the sole reason of having to move the cenotaph. One letter to the editor didn't mince words, and stated "to move the cenotaph would, quite frankly, be sacrilege." (MH News, November, 2002). Another community member threatened to chain himself to the base of the cenotaph, and all in all, over 3000 signatures were gathered against moving the effigy.

So, when a scant 20 years later, the issue of *potentially* moving the cenotaph was reintroduced, the court of public opinion was a precise, and resounding: "No." and also a bit, "I told you so."

Thus, the cenotaph, carved by master monumental sculptor Albert Hart, stands the test of time, and again, remains exactly where it belongs.

Mon.-Thurs. 70 cents, Fri.-Sat. 93 cents

**1,200
signed
against
art spot**

JAMES WOOD
Staff Writer

MEDICINE HAT

Medicine Hat News, January 18, 2001.

Membership Dues

Join the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District

Membership dues for 2022-2023 are now due. Any members who paid for 2021 will have their memberships extended through to the 2022-2023 year, due to our lack of meetings in 2021.

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 Smoke Signals Newsletter via email or printed copy.

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

July 10, 1922

LETHBRIDGE-WEYBURN LINE TO BE COMPLETED

Manyberries, July 10.—(Special to The News).—Quite the most important event in the history of the town was the unexpected appearance here last Wednesday of our old friend, Mr. D. Grant.

Mr. Grant is here making preliminary arrangements for completing the grade on the Lethbridge-Weyburn branch. He will begin work in a few days and will rush it right along.

Perhaps, to date, there is no statement given out as to the placing of the steel. However, there can be little doubt that the announcement made in the press a few days ago that the road would be completed this fall, will be fulfilled. The unusually good prospects of a crop in this territory would also lend color to this report.

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 |
| Kris Samraj | Secretary |
| Judy Morris | Treasurer |

Board of Directors

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