

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Medicine Hat and District Newsletter

Mrs. Bassett and portrait, ca. 1910



0711.0003

Interim/Acting President's Message

Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

Greetings all!

A short message this time...

First of all, we were saddened to hear of the passing of Don Weiss, board member. Don was a consummate gentleman and valued member of our board. His presence will be missed.

Sheila Tieg continues to work on a summer bus tour to Acadia Valley through Prairie Sprinter, which will likely take place in July. As indicated in our last General Meeting, while your Society will provide you with information regarding the tour, we will not be coordinating it on behalf of members.

Once firm details are known, we will provide information in the next newsletter in early May, whence members can make their own arrangements with Prairie Sprinter. It promises to be an excellent tour and a great chance for socializing!

And finally, we hope to see you all on March 30 in the Studio Theatre, with the program to be a presentation on Dauntless by our own Jenni Barrientos.

Cheers,

Tom Hamp
Acting/Interim President

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Historical Society Upcoming Program

Remember Dauntless!

R.B Shepard

What Happened to Dauntless? Have you ever *heard* of Dauntless?

Starting in 1912, the city of Dauntless grew up out of nothing, just a few kilometers south of Medicine Hat. The newspapers exploded with interest and speculation about Dauntless and were quick to note that it would be bigger than Medicine Hat in the next few years.

At its peak, Dauntless had a railway station, spur line, school, post office, water tower, and a huge Canada Cement Company factory that was supposed to employ over 800 people.

Residential lots were selling faster than they could be surveyed, but just as quickly as it began, Dauntless fell into ruins. Little did people know, the main driver of the project, the enigmatic American entrepreneur Mr. Leigh Hunt, ***had done this before.***

A prospective cement factory. A new city. A million dollar loan. He pitched, swung, and then Mr. Hunt was gone by 1918. And so was Dauntless.

How did this happen? Find out at the Historical Society's upcoming program "The Hunt for Dauntless", March 30th at 7pm in the Esplanade Studio Theatre.

Presented by Jenni Barrientos.



The Cement Factory at Dauntless, as it stands today.

Credit: Jenni Barrientos
September 17, 2020



A selection of the map showing Dauntless and surrounding area. A full reproduction of the map will be available to view at the Program.

Mr. Bassett's Violets

Colourful descriptions from across the world

by J. Barrientos

This story begins with Thomas A. Bassett, who was at one time the owner of the Cosmopolitan Hotel here in Medicine Hat (pictured to the right with his sister, Elizabeth Bassett). The Cosmopolitan Hotel, sometimes simply called "The Cos" was the first hotel in the area, and was located at 340 South Railway Street SE.

As with many buildings in the early days of Medicine Hat, the Cos had its fair share of difficulties. Famously, it burnt to the ground in 1900, only to be rebuilt by Mrs. Isabella Bassett (Thomas' mother, pictured on the front page of the newsletter), who ran the hotel as proprietor after her husband's death. Thomas A. Bassett was promised his share in ownership upon his 21st birthday, but rumours persisted that Mrs. Bassett didn't actually give up her iron grip on the hotel empire until after her death in 1920 (when Thomas was 47 years old).

The Cos was a beautiful example of fine architecture and décor of the time. When it was rebuilt after the fire, the newspapers described the refurbished rooms as: "finished in curly birch, and richly carpeted, the effect is exceedingly handsome. There are five bathrooms, two connected with suites, one adjoining Mrs. Bassett's room and one for Mr. Thos. Bassett. It is a most modern hotel, with green burlap decorations and green drapings for the windows." *Medicine Hat News*, January 7, 1909.

These colourful descriptions are important, as photography never captured colour. So imagine my surprise when I received word that things might not be as we first thought.



Esplanade Archives Image 0711.0004

Mr. Thomas A. Bassett and his sister, 1908.

Violets, con't

Does the heart sing...purple?

by J. Barrientos

I received an interesting correspondence from the archivist in Wales, UK from the West Glamorgan Archives. She explained that while doing research for an upcoming exhibit, she came across a diary entry from Elizabeth Clements, from the Welsh Ladies Choir. Elizabeth had visited Medicine Hat in September of 1911, and had taken her meals at the Cosmopolitan Hotel.

Elizabeth's description caused quite the chuckle from me when I read the transcription of it. Elizabeth says:



Esplanade Archives

0711.0003

"28 September, 1911. Arrived in Medicine Hat, had our meals at the Cosmopolitan Hotel. The manager was a queer sort of man, who in one time must have been engaged to a girl, whose favourite flower was a violet, everything about the hotel was violet, his bedroom was absolutely composed of violet, they were one mass on the dressing table, counterpane was covered with violets and he himself wore a violet tie."

Of course, this could be none other than Thomas A. Bassett. I passed along the information, and a photo or two that we have of Mr. Bassett. While I did try and find any more information on the significance of the violets, I was unable to. Mr. Bassett passed away in 1950, unmarried, and we hold none of his personal effects in the Archives. How I would love to know the story behind the colours, I am now left to imagine that the images we have of Mr. Thomas Bassett include violet-coloured ties (though, of course, the images are all black and white!).

Special thanks go out to the West Glamorgan Archives for connecting us with Elizabeth's astute observations of the Cosmopolitan Hotel, and of Mr. Bassett.

While The Cos is no longer with us (torn down in 1969 after a fire as you can see, to the left), please enjoy a view of the interior back in the early 1900s, (above) and consider adding some different colours to your imagination of this past icon.

0985.0018



Esplanade Archives, The Cos on fire, 1969.

Montreal Street School

Don Weiss' passion for History

by J. Barrientos

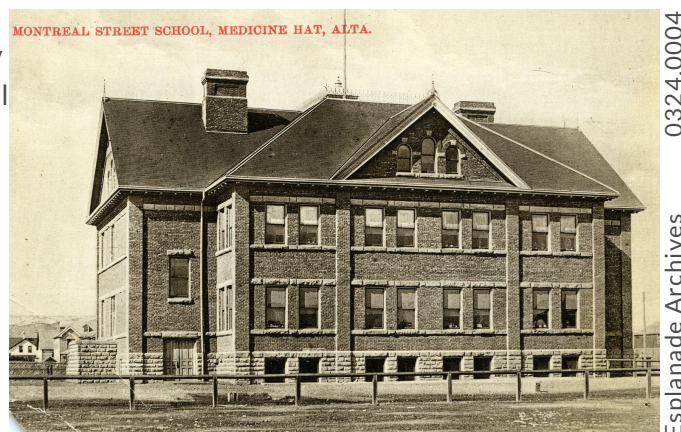
We are sad to report Don Weiss' recent passing. A long-time member of the Historical Society as a member and a board member, Don cared deeply about the community and our history. On March 8, 1996 he wrote a letter, in hopes of keeping Montreal Street School from being demolished. We have reprinted his letter here, and the original, and other information from the Montreal Street School Historical Society now resides in the Archives. The passion Don and others displayed should not be forgotten going forward. His letter follows below:

"As an introduction to myself I would like to say that I am retired now after a successful business career. At times my companies employed 80 or more people mostly in the trucking business, in particular Medalta Transport Inc. I received my basic education grades 1 to 8 at Montreal Street School and must say that because of the good old-fashioned curriculum at Montreal (and dedicated teachers) I consider myself very fortunate.

This fundamental education and the principals learned while in the grade school stood me well in all my business undertaking and I am grateful. The history of the school is well known and a great many people who attended school at Montreal feel the same as proven by the attendance at the recent reunion. I have learned about the problems the school boards in Medicine Hat are having with the changing residential patterns and declining birth rates. I can appreciate the tough decisions that boards must make. With regard to closing schools, bussing to new areas and so on. It is the responsibility of elected school boards to make the most out of the taxpayers money and schools cannot be kept open on sentimentality.

If Montreal Street School must close down as a public school, the way it has been for the past 90 years, do not let the building or grounds disappear in the name of redevelopment. Let me suggest some possibilities for its use in the event of a closure:

- Lease it out to a private school as there is a possibility it could be needed again in the future as a public school and ownership would stay as it is now.
- Retain the premises as a museum in conjunction with the local historical society, or other body such as the Montreal Street School historical society.
- Possibly a combination of uses could be made such as the upper floors put in the museum use, the gym rented out and the classroom leased to private education.



In any case, Montreal Street School is far too valuable and important to the early history of Medicine Hat to let it fall prey to the wrecking ball. The place can be put into viable use if we use our creative initiative."

Yours truly,

Don Weiss

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

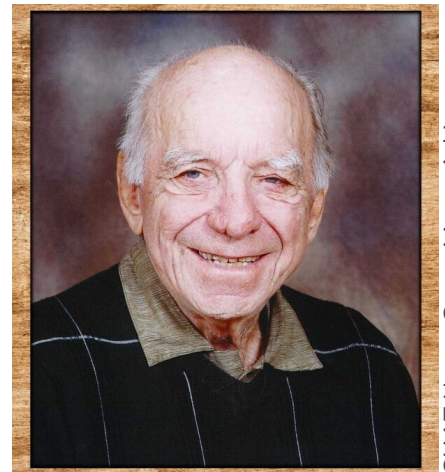
401 1 Street SE
Medicine Hat, AB
T1A 8W2

In Memoriam

Donald "Don" Weiss, 1933-2023

We are saddened by the passing of Don Weiss. His obituary in part reads: "Don's contribution to the business community was stellar serving a term as President of the Medicine Hat Chamber of Commerce and various leadership roles such as Director of the Quarter Horse Association of Alberta. Ever the wise cracker, he could change the atmosphere in a room from sombre to relaxed and he would encourage people to pray the Lord's Prayer to help them with their problems, a simple but practical faith."

Don will be truly missed by all.



CHAT News, Grace Memorial Image

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 jenutr@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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- | | |
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