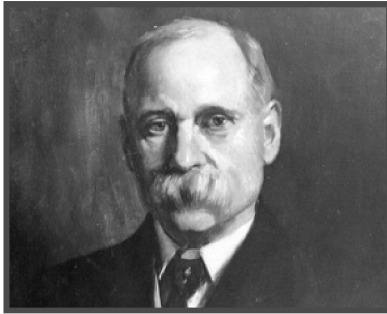


HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Medicine Hat and District Newsletter

W. T. Finlay

0055.0053



Erin Lodge

0328.0167

President's Message

Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

Hello Historical Society Members;

We are rally looking forward to our March 28 General Meeting. We have Rachael Booker from Empress coming to make a presentation. Several of our members met Ms. Booker last summer while on a bus tour in the area, were very taken with her presentation and look forward to having her come to Medicine Hat to share her stories.

Further to my comment in the last report with respect to our 2024 Christmas dinner, I have contacted the two groups we partnered with for our 2023 dinner and they indicated they were happy having us join them for this next dinner. The date will be December 3rd 2024 in the Medicine Hat Golf and Country Club. If anyone has an objection to these arrangements, changes could be made.

I have recently been scammed on my cellphone and want to warn everyone – do not open any messages on your cellphone or computer from anyone if you aren't sure who they are. I had thought I was smart enough to catch these criminals but I guess not. Fortunately, I went directly to the police department and reported the issue and quickly called my credit card companies. I was lucky – I only lost \$1.27. Please be careful when accepting messages!

I sincerely hope everyone getting this newsletter will enjoy reading it and look forward to many of you attending our next event at the Esplanade on the 28th of March at 7pm.

Please keep your eyes on the display case in the lobby of the Esplanade – you might get a nice surprise.

We are going to have a summer bar-b-que type dinner for our annual general meeting (AGM) at the Holy Family Parish Catholic Church on May 23rd with a special guest speaker. Sheila will be taking names of people wanting to attend. More details will be announced soon, we look forward to seeing you there.

Take care everyone and try to stay warm. Let's hope for lots of rain.

Judy Morris

Historical Society President

Next Meeting:

March 28th @ 7pm
Esplanade Studio Theatre

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Pulling Back the Curtains of Time

Upcoming Speaker - Rachel Booker

R.B. Shepard

Our program for our Meeting of Thursday, March 28th promises to be an especially interesting one. Our speaker will be Rachel Booker from Empress, Alberta. Her presentation will be called "Pulling Back the Curtains of Time."

Rachel was born and raised on a farm near Bow Island, Alberta. Following graduation from Senator Gershaw High School, she attended the Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta where she focussed on music. She then attended the University of Lethbridge where she obtained her Bachelor of Education degree.

One of her summer jobs was as a roving interpreter at Heritage Park in Calgary, which was her dream job as it allowed her to combine her love of history and music, and to share them with others. Upon graduation she moved to Empress to teach at Kitchener School intending to stay one year, but has never left.

She stayed in Empress because she met and married her husband Wayne Booker, a fourth generation farmer in the Empress area. Her new mother-in-law, Velma Booker, introduced her to the rich and varied Indigenous and local history of that corner of southeast Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan. She feels privileged to pursue her love of history while teaching in Empress, Acadia Valley and Oyen. She also feels privileged that her family are the gatekeepers of several historic sites which have allowed them to work with visiting archaeologists, historical groups, local individuals and tourists. They have been able to share heritage sites with people from many countries.

The grass fires of October 2017 dramatically impacted the communities in the Empress area. According to Rachel, while they devastated families, wildlife and livestock, they also pulled back the curtains of time by clearing brush, grass and even buildings revealing previously unknown archaeological and historical sites. For a period of about six months teepee villages, drive lanes and other elements were revealed, only to fade back as the grasses and brush recovered.

Pulling Back the Curtains of Time is Rachel's pictorial journey and presentation which tries to capture the long and rich history, as well as the significance, of the Empress area so that it can be shared with the next generations.

Bruce Shepard

Programs, Historical Society



Empress, ca.1912. Esplanade Archives 0817.0002

Big Questions ... and No Answers

The Persistent Mystery of “Erin Lodge”

by J. Barrientos

Often I am able to write compelling stories on the mysteries I find in the Archives. I am still surprised by the fact that new information is always being revealed; but sometimes the answer that I am seeking is... that there is no answer. For example, I was recently asked about a now-demolished residence on 1st Street. The home, at 473 1 Street SE used to belong to W.T. Finlay, and was built by another well-known citizen, Mort Fulton. W.T. Finlay, of course, was the first mayor of Medicine Hat, from 1900-1902; and the namesake of our current Finlay Bridge. It was his home from ca. 1906 when it was constructed, to his death in 1914. His widow, Catharine Finlay, lived in the home until the 1920s. Since at least 1906, the home had been lovingly referred to as “Erin Lodge.” The house was demolished in 1977. Prior to its demolition, the home was even under consideration to become an Arts Centre, due to its central location and interesting heritage, though this ultimately didn’t come to pass.

The question I received seemed simple enough - “Why was it called ‘Erin Lodge?’” I searched through the newspapers and found multiple references of W.T. Finlay referring to his home as “Erin Lodge”. Even when the house was sold in 1927 to new owners, Dr. and Mrs. Gershaw, the news reported that they “had taken up residence in their new home on First Street, ‘Erin Lodge’.” Since W.T. Finlay died in 1914, he only lived in the home for less than 10 years. But the name “Erin Lodge” persisted up until the date the home was demolished. So... why was it called “Erin Lodge”?

Unfortunately, that remains a mystery. Erin doesn’t appear to be a wife, daughter or mother of W.T. Finlay. There is some possibility, that since W.T. Finlay was born in Northern Ireland, that

the meaning of the name would relate directly to Ireland. “Éirinn” is the Irish word for the country of Ireland - and when anglicized, that becomes “Erin”. As well, it is the same for Welsh, the word “Erin” is used for Ireland. Indeed, it is commonly used as a female given name, but it is also the name that is given to the personification of the country of Ireland herself. “ó Éirinn” would mean “from Ireland”.

Perhaps it was a way for W.T. Finlay to preserve his connection to his homeland. Perhaps it was a name of a relative or lost loved one. Perhaps it has a completely different meaning. Unfortunately, I can’t provide you a true answer to this question - without diaries or familial accounts, it remains only hearsay. Do you know more? I’d love to hear from you. Thankfully, even with, or without, an “answer”, the story continues to live on.



W.T. Finlay on the steps of “Erin Lodge” ca. 1911 0376.0002

Wake Up and Shake Up

Medicine Hat's First Female Council Member, Lillian Gust

by J. Barrientos

Lillian Gust was our first female councilor. At the time, the newspapers touted that the “first woman alderman” was elected, and it caused quite the stir! In those days, the City still called their elected officials “alderman”, a title that Gust received with pride. Gust served on council from 1951-1957.



Council Recognition of L. Gust, 0752.0057

She was also a skilled business woman and very active in the community as a member of the Chamber of Commerce, the Quota Club, St. John’s Presbyterian Church and the Medicine Hat General Hospital Board. Born Susan Elizabeth Lillian Scott in Caledonia, Ontario in 1882, her family moved to Chicago and she began training as a pharmacist. While in Chicago, she met and married Samuel Emanuel Gust. The young family moved to Medicine Hat in 1913, and opened a Medicine Hat grocery business, called the S.E. Gust Store – also known as The Penny Profit Store. Finding great success in the market, the stores expanded, and at its height, had nine different stores all across Southern Alberta. Samuel died in 1932, and Lillian continued to manage the small grocery empire until her retirement in 1948.

Her first attempt at holding public office came immediately after, in 1949, but was unsuccessful. The following year came a special opportunity for Gust to try again, as there was a by-election called. Gust began an energetic marketing campaign for her election.

One of her election advertisements stated: “I know the best thing that could happen to council would be to have one woman on it. I would wake them up!”. Gust also was quoted as saying “A woman’s influence is needed. Clear away their cobwebs and allow clear thinking in the public interest. I would wake them up.”

And wake up they did - Gust won the by-election of 1950, and went on to serve on council for seven years. She was instrumental in preparing the groundwork for a municipal bus system for the city. Later, Gust said of the project: “Every time I see a city bus, I feel a certain amount of pride.” A pillar of the community, and a visionary for new projects for seniors and the disadvantaged, Lillian Gust passed away in 1975.

Lillian E. Gust, ca. 1965



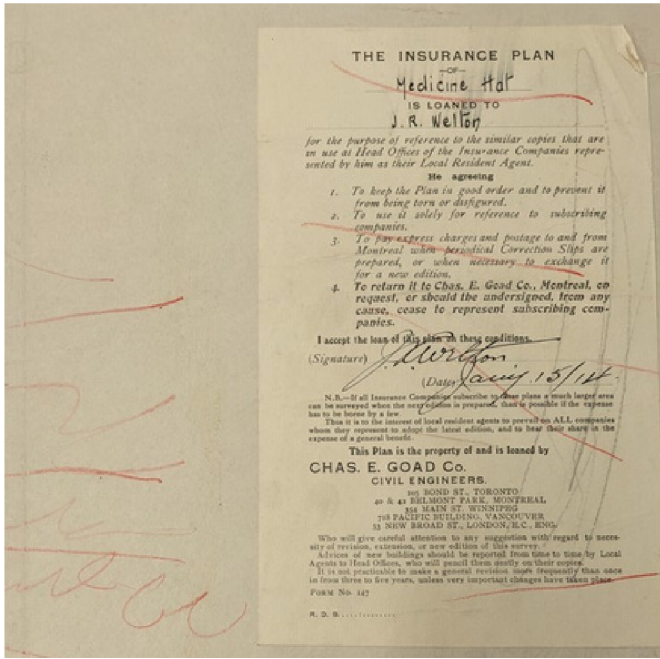
Archives Image 0055.0060

That is All That Is Left

The Importance of Saving Your Historic Items

by J. Barrientos

Graffiti on the 1914 Fire Insurance Map Cover

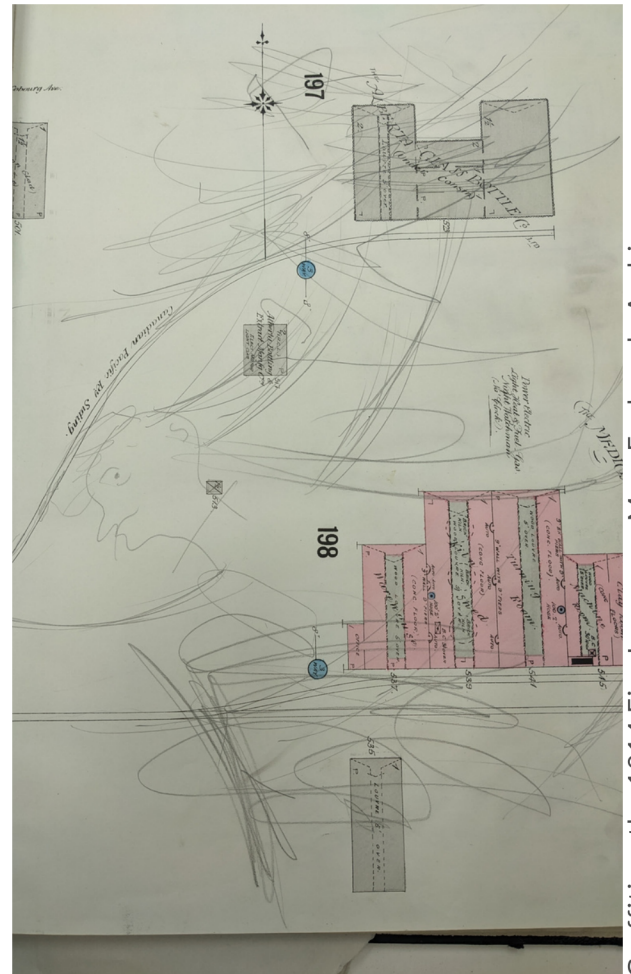


Many times I have heard from researchers and visitors, “I can’t believe someone would throw that away!” Sadly, it’s all too true. If only someone had the foresight to save a certain item, diary or photograph. If only consideration would have been given to the preservation of history. If only someone had the want, desire or hope for the future to hold on to things from the past.

In the same respect, there is also a thought of “why would anyone want to keep that?” That is why the archives are a wonderful medium between these two worlds. We have a vast collection of documents, photographs and textual records that numbers well over 1.1 linear kilometres. But we are always willing to view new items for donation to our collections. Many of these items would otherwise find their way to the landfill and we are happy to preserve them for that very reason.

We understand that a large collection of personal papers can be overwhelming; especially if there doesn’t seem to be any rhyme or reason to the collection. If you can, ask yourself: “does this have significance to Medicine Hat and area, or to the people who live here?” If so, then it may be something that the Esplanade Archives would be interested in accepting for donation.

Take for example, our collection of fire insurance maps. These are invaluable documents, and are used quite frequently for researchers who are looking for current building permits. It is important for a current builder to understand the past history of a property. Yet these fire insurance maps almost made their way into the garbage -- because they had been used as a colouring book in the past by a wayward child! Thinking that no one would ever want a scribbled on book, they almost were lost to time. Thankfully, they did end up as a donation to our collection, but it’s an cautionary note: to take a careful view of things before deciding their value. Even if they’re a copy, has the original been lost? Would this be otherwise impossible to reproduce? Does it have value and significance? If so, please consider keeping these documents safe, so that future generations can benefit. Even if they might be a bit more *colourful* than expected!



Graffiti on the 1914 Fire Insurance Map, Esplanade Archives

Membership Dues

Join the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District

Please note that our membership cycle is May - April. You can pay for your 2024-2025 memberships at our upcoming AGM on May 23rd, 2024! Those owing can pay any time in person or by mail.

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 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



Upcoming Event

May 23rd, 2024 - 5:30pm, Holy Family Parish, 1451 Strachan Road SE

Our May Annual General Meeting (AGM) is coming up, and we would like to invite you to a special dinner meeting. Tickets for dinner will be \$10 - and your annual membership dues are \$10 - bring \$20 to get supper *and* a yearly Historical Society membership! More details to follow soon.



Executives

Judy Morris	President
Bruce Shepard	1st Vice President
Earl Morris	2nd Vice President
Leahandra Peterson	Secretary
Nick Martin	Treasurer

Board of Directors

Bruce Shepard	Programs
Sheila Tiegs	Book Sales
Lynn Rance	Membership
Lorine Marshall	Director-At-Large

Jenni Barrientos Newsletter Editor

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