

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Medicine Hat and District Newsletter

1061.0001
Archives Image

Medicine Hat Airport, ca. 1930



President's Message

Next Meeting:

November 20th, 7pm
Monarch Theatre

Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

One of the things which impressed me about Medicine Hat from the time we moved here is how engaged many people are with the history and heritage of the community, the region and our country. It is a key element of the rootedness which those born and raised here feel and which we relative newcomers sense and have come to appreciate. It helps us maintain our mental balance in turbulent times cause by economic uncertainty, technological upheaval and the turmoil stimulated by the rampant narcissism we witness daily.

Your continuing Membership in this Society, and your support of our programs and activities, are significant contributors to this engagement with history and heritage. Your Board of Directors is keenly aware of its roles and responsibilities in this process. We remain focused on the health of our Society, its financial stability, the programs and activities we support and the number of Members we attract and retain.

At its recent Meeting your Board was informed by our Treasurer, Jillian Koch, that we have more than \$20,000.00 in our Casino Account and approximately \$18,000.00 in Operating Funds. Our donation of \$10,000.00 to the Monarch 1911 Society was accepted by them; with considerable appreciation. Our Report to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Corporation was received by them in June and accepted.

We were informed that our Membership continues to recover from the pandemic lockdown. We currently have 75 Members, and there were a dozen new Members at our last Presentation. Several long time Members have not yet paid their dues though and need to contact Lynn Weiss to renew their Memberships.

The Reception at the Cypress Club after the last Presentation was very well received. We received many compliments. We plan on doing it again after the November gathering.

Your Board has been working with the management of Medalta on the sale of a collection of Altglass items which were gifted to the two organizations. Your Board decided that we will claim several to serve as gifts to our Speakers. The remainder will be sold, and there will be a table offering them at Medalta's upcoming Christmas Fair, with the proceeds divided between the two organizations. We also received an update on our upcoming Christmas Party which will be held on Tuesday December 2nd at the Medicine Hat Golf and Country Club with cocktails at 5:30 PM and dinner at 6:00 PM. Tickets are \$40.00 per person and can be obtained from our Past President Judy Morris.

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President's Report, con't

Update on the Historical Society

R.B. Shepard

We were informed by Board Member Laurel Schlaht, who attended the repatriation and reburial ceremony of historic human remains found here, that it was cancelled and the remains returned to Edmonton. This was due to a legal intervention by a Saskatchewan First Nation who claimed them. We were also informed that an Alberta First Nation has also since filed a legal claim to the remains. We will continue to monitor developments with this sensitive issue. We will keep the Membership informed of developments.

Several new and interesting research, publication and other projects have been brought to the attention of your Board. A project to research and locate early brick yards in the community is being developed and may require your Society's support. A documentary film on the children of the British Block affected by the wartime expropriation of the land to create the Suffield Military Base is under development and we have been approached to assist in the funding. Your Board expressed interest, but requires more information before deciding. A display of large scale photographs from the project will be on exhibit in the Lobby of the Esplanade in the near future. We were also informed of a potential video history project utilizing the Cypress Club.

Our Vice President, Malcolm Sissons, has been authoring and co-authoring a newspaper column on local sites, buildings and people for several years. It has been suggested to him that these could be gathered together in book form and published by your Society. Your Board expressed interest, but asked for additional information on copyright and costs.

Our newest Board Member, Troy Wason, also serves on the City's Heritage Resources Working Group and reported on his attendance on the national conference of the National Trust. He was very impressed, recommended that we join and the Board approved. This Membership will provide us with information on heritage developments across the country as well as a potential source for assistance and advice on local projects. Troy also reported that he will connect with our Secretary Jenni Barrientos on Jim Marshall's offer to help design a new logo for our Society. We have also been contacted by individuals wanting to promote their own historic events and your Board decided to consider these on a case by case basis.

The next Board Meeting will be held at St. John's Church downtown on Tuesday, December 9th beginning at 7:00 PM. Any Member with business relating to the Society's activities, or questions regarding it, is urged to contact the President or Secretary with the information or to be added to the Agenda. Any ideas, suggestions or advice for the Board are also welcome and may be conveyed through the President.

Sincerely,

R.B. Shepard



President, Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District

Programs Report

A Local Aviation History Presentation

by R.B Shepard

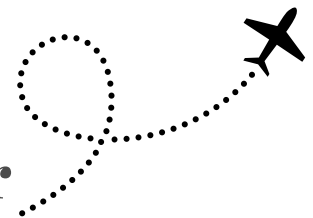
Medicine Hat has a long history with aviation. Now a new group has arisen to help explore, explain and promote that heritage. The Medicine Hat Chapter of the Canadian Aviation Historical Society is led by one of our Past Presidents, Wes Krause.

Wes Krause was born and raised in Medicine Hat and spent more than 30 years in the City's service. He is probably better known as a popular and passionate volunteer in our historical community. He has also been, or is currently, a member of more than two dozen local, regional, provincial, national and international heritage organizations and was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal for his volunteer work.

Wes has been the Curator of the South Alberta Light Horse Regimental Museum since 2014. Since 2022 he has also been the Archives Officer of the Robertson Memorial Number 17 Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. He is currently the President, and a founding member, of the Medicine Hat Chapter Canadian Aviation Historical Society.

Wes will speak to our Society on Thursday, November 20th at the Monarch Theatre, followed by a reception at the Cypress Club. As is our custom his presentation will follow a brief business meeting. Wes will speak on "The Lost 48, Medicine Hat Chapter Canadian Aviation Historical Society."

R.B. Shepard,
Program Coordinator



Cy Becker, Veteran Aviation Pioneer

From Medicine Hat to Edmonton, "Becker" is the Word!

by J. Barrientos



ca. 1920s

Archival Image 0481.0023

Image at left of Charles "Cy" Becker, seated in the pilot's seat of an aeroplane at Chateau Airport. He was a true pioneer in Alberta aviation. Cy's father, Richard Cecil Becker, was a CPR conductor, and a Medicine Hat alderman in 1917. But Cy's accomplishments in aviation have made him a household name - literally - as there is an entire Edmonton community named after him!

He was a World War I combat pilot, and started his career as a pilot with the Royal Naval Air Service in the Great War. In 1929 he co-founded Commercial Airways Ltd., and was instrumental in the construction of the first municipal airport in downtown Edmonton. (*Partial Information from Sally Sehn, Heritage in the Hat, "Becker's Pride and Joy", May 16, 2020, MH News.*)

Honor Currie

Veteran Hatter and a Life of Service

by J. Barrientos

You may recognize the name of Honour Currie, at least if you've booked a meeting in the Medicine Hat Public Library, in the room named in her legacy. Honor Currie was Medicine Hat's longest-serving Canadian on the Women's Royal Naval Service, or "Wrens", who dedicated more than five continuous years to naval service during the Second World War.

Leaving Medicine Hat in 1939, she set out to "travel the world", she said, and she did just that, during the next 30 years of her life. She had a \$100 steerage ticket, one way, to visit the Old Country, and \$100 in cash. First stop was to visit her relatives in Scotland, and she was in Edinburgh when war was declared. Her first act of service was with the evacuation of children in Scotland before volunteering with the Wrens in early 1940. From there, she joined the Auxiliary Fire Service, from which she transferred to the Women's Royal Naval Service and was sent to Plymouth where she had said of the posting: "we went through some very terrible bombing." In 1942, Honor transferred again, this time to the Women's Royal Canadian Navy, Ottawa, to work in Operational Intelligence.

In 1943 she became Unit Officer of H.M.C.S. Bytown, responsible for training, leadership, and the well-being of Wrens under her command. She spoke often of the growth she witnessed among her women, such as greater tolerance, maturity, and broadened worldviews forged through service. Lieutenant Commander Currie was demobilized in 1945, on a Friday afternoon.

The following Monday, still in her Naval uniform because she had no civvies, she reported to the Canadian Department of External Affairs. Her first job there was repatriating Prisoners of War from the Far East. Honor stayed with External Affairs for the next 30 years. She served in Belgium, Yugoslavia, Japan, California, Israel, England, and three terms in Canada, eventually retiring as a foreign commanding officer of the Canadian High Commissioner in London, England. Her responsibilities were many and varied in each posting.

Honor retired to Medicine Hat in 1975 to care for her mother - age 90 at the time. Though this may not have been her plan, Honor found life in Medicine Hat again to be much to her liking. She had a lovely home, full of treasures from her travels. Honor died in her home in January of 1991, after a patriotic and beautiful life of service.



Finding Your Own “Roots”

Pilot Graduate of the No. 34 SFTS during WWII

by William J. Anhorn

The Medicine Hat and District Genealogical Society occasionally receives inquiries from abroad seeking information about individuals once connected to the region. A recent request from Nottingham, England prompted renewed interest in Medicine Hat’s significant role during the Second World War through the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). The inquiry concerned Harold Henry Victor “Nobby” Roots, a young Royal Air Force pilot who trained in Medicine Hat in 1942 and later died in a training accident on June 6, 1944.

Roots was part of the No. 61 graduating class of No. 34 Service Flying Training School (SFTS), where he was recognized as the RAF’s leading student and delivered the toast to the King at graduation. No. 34 SFTS, operating from 1941 to 1944, was one of 107 Canadian training centers created under the BCATP—Canada’s massive wartime commitment to supplying aircrew for Allied forces. The plan transformed Canadian landscapes into busy aerodromes, training over 131,000 pilots and aircrew from across the Commonwealth and occupied Europe. Medicine Hat’s school trained more than 2,000 pilots, though 50 students and instructors lost their lives, many now buried in Hillside Cemetery.

The presence of the air school shaped Medicine Hat economically and socially. Local dances, community events, and growing friendships forged lasting ties; many airmen later returned to settle permanently. After the war, the aerodrome became today’s Medicine Hat Regional Airport. While its relief landing fields at Whitla and Holsom Road have disappeared, the legacy remains commemorated by local memorials and history books such as *Prairie Wings*. Roots, who survived air raids in France and served in Malta, longed to fly. Tragically, at age 24, he died attempting to land a burning aircraft while training another pilot. Their dedication reflects the sacrifice of thousands.

Local history like that of No. 34 SFTS anchors community identity, honors those who served, and preserves stories future generations must remember.



At left, No. 34 SFTS (Medicine Hat) No. 61 Pupil Pilots’ Course, November, 1942. Roots, circled in red.

Archival Image 1102.06.0007.

The full article about Harold Henry Victor “Nobby” Roots, can be found on the Mad Hatter Historian’s website at: <https://wjanhorn.ca/>



Membership Dues

Join the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District

by Lynne Rance

Hi Everyone,

Time to pay membership dues of \$10.00 until May 1, 2026. Dues can be paid at our next meeting or can be mailed to the address below. Newsletters will be e-mailed to you.

If your e-mail address has changed, please let Lynne Rance know by phone, 403-527-7914.

Mailing Address:

Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District
c/o 401 1 Street SE
Medicine Hat, AB
T1A 8W2



Historical Society Christmas Party

Tuesday December 2nd at the Medicine Hat Golf and Country Club with cocktails at 5:30 PM and dinner at 6:00 PM. Tickets are \$40.00 per person and can be obtained from our Past President Judy Morris.



Hope to see you there!

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

Board of Directors

Bruce Shepard	President
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