

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Medicine Hat and District Newsletter

Roloff Beny Artwork, ca. 1950



#0323, #0318, #0322 and #0306

President's Message

Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

Next Meeting:

September 25th, 2025
7pm @ Monarch Theatre

Having been on the Boards of many historical, museum and other not-for-profit societies, I have become fascinated with how people find ways to work together on things with which they share an interest and a passion. It is an important issue because, as recent events have shown, emotions, once triggered, can badly trip us up. As your President, I can assure you that you have chosen your new Board of Directors well and that, if our first Meeting was any indication, you will be well served by them.

We spent time discussing our responsibilities as Directors under the Societies Act of Alberta. We have legal responsibilities to you as Members and to the other citizens of our Province. The exchange was frank, open and honest and, I believe, we all came away with a better understanding and appreciation of the trust which you have placed in us and how to conduct ourselves while doing the work you expect of us. We then spent a fair bit of time reorganizing our Committees according to our new By-laws. We have eight of them and your Board Members stepped up quickly to Chair them. They are as follows:

- Casino – Judy and Lynn. We will be able to host a casino in the fall of 2026;
- Finance- Jillian, our Treasurer;
- Membership – Lynne, who noted 50 members currently, and more renewals on the way;
- Nominating – Past-President Judy;
- Preservation and Research – Malcolm;
- Programs (including Social) – Bruce;
- Publicity and Public Relations – Troy;
- Publications- Karen.

We then discussed our relationship with Medalta, including the further development of their site, signage and advertising, as well as a possible research project aimed at locating the sites of five other now-unknown brick yards in the City. We also discussed how to manage the remaining inventory of Altaglass which was donated to Medalta with proceeds from the sale to be split between us. We then discussed how to deal with another research inquiry which we have received regarding John Deere farm equipment dealerships in the area.

We concluded by agreeing to host a Christmas Party this year and to invite other groups to join us. Past-President Judy will again be organizing it, but she would welcome any volunteers. The other Chairs of the Committees also expressed hope that other Members might step forward to help with the work of their Committees.

Sincerely;

R.B. Shepard

President, Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

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Historical Society Programs

“The Inconvenient Husband” by Dr. Sarah Carter

R.B Shepard

Our next Regular Meeting will take place on Thursday, September 25, 2025, which is a week later than usual to accommodate our Speaker. We will gather at 7:00 PM at our historic Monarch Theatre and begin with a brief business summary followed by the Presentation. Memberships can be renewed or obtained for \$10.00 at the door and refreshments will be available as you enter.

Our Speaker will be Dr. Sarah Carter, recently retired as Professor and Henry Marshall Tory Chair Emerita in the Department of History Classics and Religion, and the Faculty of Native Studies of the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Originally from Saskatoon, she is a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Manitoba.



Dr. Sarah Carter, June 2023. Credit: University of Alberta, Department of History, Classics and Religion.

She has taught at the University of Winnipeg and the University of Calgary before joining the University of Alberta in 2006. She is a nationally recognized scholar and the author of several major and important works on the history of Western Canada including *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*; *“Ours By Every Law of Right and Justice”*: *Women and the Vote in the Prairie Provinces*; and *Imperial Plots: Women, Land and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies*.

The title of Dr. Carter’s talk will be, *“The Inconvenient Husband”*: *Women and Homesteading in Western Canada*. While many of us are the descendants of homesteaders in this region, few are aware that at the time women, unless they were widowed with children, were legally prohibited from filing for or obtaining a homestead. Despite this barrier, women did become homesteaders, farmers and ranchers although according to one female critic it seemed like you needed to get rid of an inconvenient husband to qualify for a homestead.

We will be extending invitations to join us to members of the Faculty of Medicine Hat College, and to the History Departments of the Universities of Lethbridge, Calgary, Regina and Saskatchewan and their students. Please give a warm Medicine Hat welcome to such visitors when you encounter them. Also, please extend invitations to attend to your families, friends and neighbours to join us.

We are attempting to arrange another military themed Speaker for November as it is Remembrance Month. As always, your ideas and suggestions for topics are welcome. Please contact me with them.

Sincerely;

R.B. Shepard

The Magic and Mystery of Roloff Beny

Local Artist who Achieved International Fame

by J. Barrientos

(R) Image 29642, May 31, 1948. Roloff Beny, centre, surrounded by his family. Date of the image suggests this could be an image of Beny leaving Medicine Hat for Europe for the first time - he will never live in Medicine Hat again.



A man in a small straw hat came up to my desk at the Archives a few weeks ago and said: "You look bored." While I assured him I really wasn't, he went on to say: "You got a funding problem around here? I have a funding solution for you."

"We don't really have a funding problem," I reply, a bit hesitantly, "But what's the solution? In case I need it for next time."

"Now you're getting it," he snapped his fingers and pointed at me. "You ever heard of Roloff Beny?"

"Yes," I reply, "Roloff Beny is a photographer, born in Medicine Hat."

"Close, Irvine actually." But he's pleased I knew about Beny. The man is wearing a set of keys which dangles around his neck. I can't quite tell what he's after, and as if he can read my mind he replies quickly. "I'm not from around here. Just visiting."

"Mhm," I say. "So, about Roloff Beny...?"

"Right, you're about to be *real* familiar with him. You buying a car on kijiji right now?" He leans a bit forward to check my open computer screen.

"No?" I tap the screen. "I'm looking for a Lutheran Church in Manyberries."

"How pious," he quips. "But don't buy the Volvo, you know, it's not worth it. Or the Ford - can't trust them. You going to write that down?" He's smiling, but it's not quite reaching his eyes. A beat of silence while I try and gather how I managed to acquire such a man appearing at my desk.

"Nah," he continued, with a wave of a hand, answering his own question. "You seem smart. You'll remember. Just remember what I'm saying, that's all I am asking."

Beny, con't

Artistic Legacy and an Iranian Connection

by J. Barrientos

"You have Beny's Iran negatives?" he winks at me. "I know the answer, of course, it's 'no'. But that's part of the fun." He continues in the same breath: "Did you know that Roloff Beny never smoked a cigarette without a holder? And lived in a 12 room apartment in Rome. And you know, he took photographs for the Shah of Iran. Of the *last* Shah. Before the assassination attempt, by the CIA, no less. Ask yourself this - what was someone, a no one, a nobody, from Irvine! What was he doing in Iran taking photos of the Shah?"

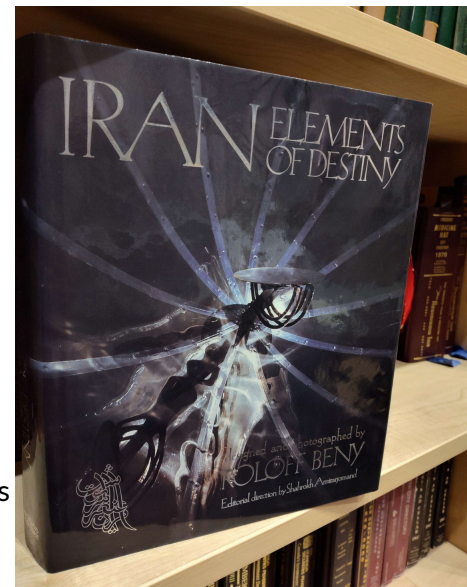
"I don't know?," I answer, trying to pack all of this into my brain as fast as possible, because somehow, I can tell that this isn't going to be a very long conversation.

"Of course you don't know, you don't even have the Beny book about Iran. I looked, you know, I haven't seen it on your shelves, but it isn't on *any* shelves. And that's interesting to me. Here, in Medicine Hat, where Beny was from, and you don't have his book on Iran? But if you get it, get more information, or even better, **an exhibit**, on Beny, now... there's your funding solution."

The man takes my card, oddly tucking it under the strap of his watch, and bids me farewell. As I suspected, the conversation is over as quickly as it started. After, in the rich silence in the archives, I look a bit more into Roloff Beny. His father was a car dealer, owned numerous car dealerships in Medicine Hat. Beny Motors. They sold Ford cars. I found an article about Roloff Beny which ran in 1955 and it reads: "The myth makes Beny a poseur in black fur jackets sewn from dyed mink-bellies, a man who a couple of years back braved Vancouver's rain in a mink-lined raincoat, making sure the lining showed; a man who affects elegance and lengthy cigarette holders." Another article in 1961 reads: "A Canadian artist, a Siberian dog, and a Sicilian manservant are the new tenants of a penthouse apartment on Rome's west bank. The artist is Roloff Beny, effervescent, curly haired painter-photographer from Medicine Hat."

Born Wilfred Roy Beny, he took his mother's maiden name, Roloff, as his first name to start his art career. His works appear in the Museum of Modern Art, and the National Gallery of Canada. He died young, on March 16, 1984 of a heart attack, in his studio overlooking the Italian Tiber river. The Iran negatives are housed at Library and Archives Canada (LAC), and are estimated to be worth over \$8 million dollars. (Perhaps a bit out of our budget, after all.)

I checked right away on the online book circuit to see if I could find Roloff Beny's book on Iran. With luck, there was one single copy available, out of Nova Scotia, which is now purchased and on the shelves in the Reading Room. For more information on Roloff Beny, to view some of his artwork (featured on the front of this Newsletter), or other archival materials, please feel free to visit the Esplanade, Tuesday-Friday, from 1pm - 5pm. I promise, it's *never* boring!



Roloff Beny's "Iran: Elements of Destiny" in The Archives Reading Room, newly acquired (2025)

Mosquito Celebration Day Event

Historic Aircraft Honoured in Nanton, AB

by Wes Krause

On July 19th at the Mosquito Celebration Day event was held at The Bomber Command Museum in Nanton, Alberta. Medicine Hat Canadian Aviation Historical Society (CAHS) Chapter President Wes Krause CM, presented a cheque to the president and founder of the Calgary Mosquito Society and Calgary CAHS Chapter President Richard de Boer. Wes Krause is also a long-time Historical Society member and one of our Past Presidents!

This event was in support of the efforts and continuing work by the Mosquito Society to restore and preserve a truly historic aircraft: the DeHavilland Mosquito. The aircraft is being restored on site at The Bomber Command Museum in Nanton, Alberta.

This Mosquito, serial No. RS700, served in the post-war RAF (Royal Air Force) and in a photo-mapping role with Spartan Airways. The aircraft was used for aerial photography of remote regions of Canada, as well as the Dominican Republic and Colombia. No. RS700 is one of only 31 De Havilland Mosquitos still in existence. Just four are airworthy; only two are flying, one of which is based at KF Aerospace in Kelowna, B.C.

CAHS Chapters across Canada preserve aviation history as well as support local and regional aviation initiatives and historical projects. The Medicine Hat chapter also holds monthly meetings at the Royal Canadian Legion, Medicine Hat. We appreciate their ongoing work on preservation of Canadian aviation history. For more information on the CAHS, please contact: mhavsocprez@gmail.com



Wes Krause of CAHS (L) presents a cheque to Richard de Boer (R) for restoration efforts for the DeHavilland Mosquito aircraft, a British twin-engined, multirole combat aircraft, introduced during the Second World War.

Submitted Image, Wes Krause

Membership Information

Join us at our Upcoming General Meeting

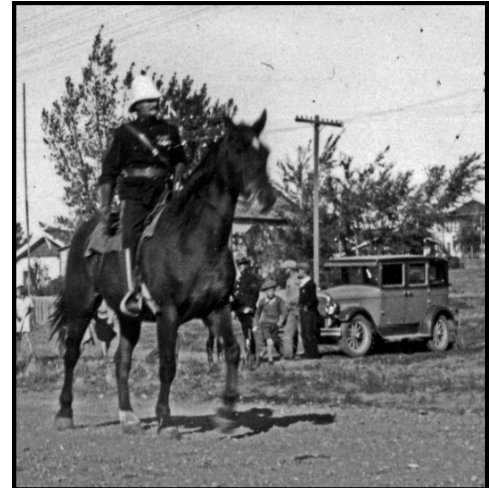
by Lynne Rance

As a reminder, your membership year runs from May-April, 2025-2026, which follows our fiscal year. Your \$10 membership to the Historical Society allows you to access the newsletter, as well as attend our Programs hosted at the General Meetings. Memberships can be paid in person at the General Meetings, or by cheque in the mail to:

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

Captain William Parker

Parker was an English emigrant, farm labourer, Mountie, Great March West, Typhoid survivor, witnessed signing of Treaty #6 and #7, husband, father, Barr Colonists, Sam Steele/Riel Uprising, Boer War, local Justice of the Peace and Magistrate, prolific writer, and local raconteur.



William Parker, Archives : 0744.0034

Join Lorine Marshall, local historian, who will be sharing the amazing life story of Captain William Parker’s career as a Mountie on our prairie frontier. Parker served for 38 years including his last posting in Medicine Hat in 1905 and was known as “one of the Hat’s old timers”.



Lorine’s Presentation is at 7pm, October 22, 2025.

Located at Morrow Hall, St. John’s Church. Free parking in Esplanade lot, and free admission.

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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