

Visit to Alix

On a gorgeous day in early September we (Suzanne Davidson, Jack Twells, Ivy Trumpour) made the two hour drive to the lovely village of Alix, Alberta, home to fewer than 1,000 people. Alix is located on Highway 12, about 5 km west of Highway 21. Travelling down the neat and tidy main street we passed the hotel, shops, museum, Home Hardware, grocery store, credit union and other businesses. At the end of the street is the war memorial, campground, beach and Alix Lake, which was being enjoyed by some canoeists.

The Wagon Wheel Museum is open daily during the summer and by appointment from September to April. Donna, the Historical Society President, kindly gave us a personal tour of the facility. It is called Wagon Wheel Museum because Alix is at the centre of several school districts whose locations form the spokes of a wheel. The artifacts are creatively displayed in one building. A recent donation of over 100 ladies' hats used at a tea party farewell to the student workers before they returned to their studies in Lethbridge was first to capture our interest.

One corner of the museum describes Irene Parlby, who lived in the area. She is known for her participation in the "Persons Case" as one of the Famous Five who signed the petition to the Supreme Court, although the movement was led by Emily Murphy. Mrs. Parlby's greater accomplishments were being elected to the Alberta Legislature, and becoming the second woman in the British Empire appointed to a cabinet position. In this capacity she was a delegate to the International Council of Women in Washington DC, and investigated education and co-operatives in Scandinavia and Britain. She was one of three Canadian delegates to the League of Nations (forerunner of the United Nations) in Geneva.

The museum recognizes several other noteworthy women from Alix including writer Barbara Villy Cormack, journalist Marj Ludvigsson, artists Alice Nielsen and Alice Whitfield. The village is named for Alix Westhead, the first white woman to settle in the area. The vivacious woman met Sir William Van Horne in Montreal, and as the President of the Canadian Pacific Railway, he selected the name of the village when it was incorporated in 1907. Previously it had been called Toddsville in recognition of Joseph Todd, an early settler. It was at the invitation of her friend Alix that Irene Parlby first came from England to Canada. Alix and her husband Charles had arrived in 1890, and after Charles joined the Boer War in 1900, Alix managed the Westhead Ranch until she returned to England in 1913 where she managed the Exbury Estate. When Charles finished his military service he settled in British Columbia.

A gigantic beaver that was trapped in the area is the focal point of the wildlife section of the museum. Even the largest form available had to be modified by the taxidermist to fit the animal. There were exhibits of toys, churches, a pioneer kitchen, farm tools, education, sports, industry, military and service clubs. A huge book that must have been a foot thick could have provided a lifetime of reading at one page a day. A lacrosse stick found in a farmer's field might have been used by aboriginal people. The Central Alberta Dairy Pool was a thriving business from 1916 to 1976 when it tragically burned. A large solidified aluminum "sculpture" that was created in the fire is on display.

Donna was pleased to receive our research of Irene Parlby's Loyalist ancestry. Irene's father Lt. Col. Lindsay Marryat took up farming near the Parllys after he retired from engineering management in India and Egypt. Several descendants still live in the area. We did not meet any, and as in most families, some are interested in history and some are not.

After soaking up information from Donna we crossed the street to Sweet Crumbs Cakery for lunch. Despite the small size, it had a good variety of lunch fare. We topped our meal off with a monster mouth watering apple cinnamon roll that was easily shareable by the three of us.

The cemetery is fittingly located next to the Haunted Lakes Golf Course. The Parlby and Marryat families are buried in the older section on the west side of the road. Irene and Walter Parlby memorials

are at the far southeast corner, and the Marryat family in the far northeast corner. It is a peaceful and well kept burial ground on either side of a "fairy dell" alleyway of graceful trees.

Next time you find yourself travelling on Highway 21 or 12 we recommend you stop in Alix. An ideal time would be in mid August when Alix Days Parade and Rodeo takes place. Be sure to keep an eye out for Alixgator, the village mascot.

