

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Medicine Hat and District Newsletter

View of Assiniboia Hotel

ca. 1898



Esplanade Archives

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Medicine Hat, Assa.

President's Message

Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

Next Meeting:

Thursday, Sept 26 @ 7pm
Monarch Theatre

We have been through some trying times. The pandemic and the resulting social disruption have taken a terrible toll. We owe a great debt of gratitude to those officers and Members of our Society who have kept us going through it all.

We are now in the process of rebuilding and renewing. Our Membership members are rebounding and we had a very good turnout for our Annual General Meeting and dinner. Unfortunately, some imperfections continue to haunt us and we were unable to transact all of our business at that Meeting. Due to unforeseen and unavoidable circumstances, our Financial Report had not been audited, but this has now been addressed. Not all of your Board offices were filled, but thankfully that has also been addressed. The Board, and I, urge you to attend the upcoming General Meeting to finalize this business so that we can move on with the current year.

We will be discussing other matters. It has been suggested that we open a Zoom Account which would allow members to view our proceedings and our speakers from home. This has real advantages for those unable to attend in person and for our rural Members who might be uncertain about travelling!

Our General Meeting will be held at the historic Monarch Theatre on **Thursday, September 26th beginning at 7:00 PM**. The Monarch 1911 Society extended an invitation for us to use the facility. It will be an experiment for us and we would like feedback from the Membership. There would be significant cost savings which could then be applied to other programs and projects. It will also be an opportunity for Members who have not yet had a chance to visit the Monarch to see the work which has been done and to learn more about what is being proposed. Visiting the Monarch might also be an opportunity for you to invite family and friends to see what has been happening. There are also many newcomers to the City who might be interested in learning about their new home. Please consider inviting them to join you at our Meeting, staying for our speaker and perhaps taking out a Membership.

We are at an important juncture in the rebuilding of our Society and we need your involvement to make it happen.

All the Best,
Bruce Shepard
Historical Society President

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Programmes

“Borders are Stupid” by Dr. McManus

by R.B. Shepard

Medicine Hat is bordered. Our community is situated just west of the Treaty Seven boundary. We are also just north of the International border with the United States and just west of the Provincial boundary with Saskatchewan.

These boundaries shape us in many ways and we are not always aware of them. Borders are ancient legal constructions which have expanded and receded over time. What makes them real are the legal enforcement of them.

With the provocative title, “Borders are Stupid,” Dr. Sheila McManus will be the Guest Speaker at the Meeting of the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District on Thursday, September 26th at the historic Monarch Theatre. The evening will begin at 7:00PM with a brief Business Meeting followed by a refreshment break. Dr. McManus’s presentation will begin at 8:00 PM.

Dr. McManus is a Professor in the Department of History and Religion at the University of Lethbridge. She completed her B.A. with Honours and in the Cooperative Program at the University of Calgary. She then finished an M.A. at the University of Victoria before heading east to complete her doctorate at York University in Toronto.

She was the first Annual Postdoctoral Associate at the Howard Lamar Center for the Study of Frontiers at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

Her first book was *The Line which Separates: Race, Gender and the Making of the Alberta - Montana Borderlands*, published in 2005 by the University of Nebraska Press. In 2022 *Writing the Edges of the North American West* was published by Texas A&M University Press. She has also co-edited two anthologies one of which, *Challenging Borders: Contingencies and Consequences* is forthcoming from Athabasca University Press.

Dr. McManus’s presentation launches our fall program of speakers. We are currently finalizing our guest presenters for November and January. As always, suggestions for topics and speakers are welcome.



Dr. McManus -- Image Courtesy of the University of Lethbridge

End of a New and Old Era

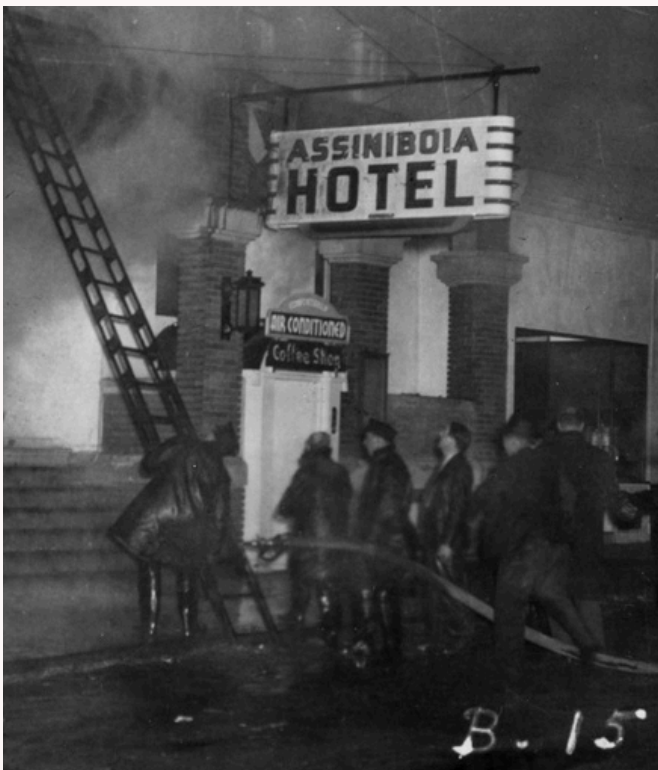
The Assiniboia Hotel “Inn” its Last Days

By J. Barrientos

Recently, the old neon sign from the Assiniboia Inn was taken down and dismantled from its prominent feature in downtown Medicine Hat. The history of the Assiniboia reached all the way back to the 1890s, and was one of the founding businesses of Medicine Hat in its infancy.

Before 1905, this part of Canada included a number of familiar provinces, but organized in a vastly different way than we are used to today. We used to be a part of the Northwest Territories, in the District of Assiniboia. Above us was Saskatchewan, which strangely included Saskatoon and Prince Albert, but not Regina, Moose Jaw and Swift Current - which all belonged instead with Medicine Hat in Assiniboia. Further north still was Athabasca, while to the east was the relatively tiny province of Manitoba. To the west, the smaller portion of “Alberta” included Lethbridge, Red Deer, Calgary and Edmonton. The District of Assiniboia was an interesting division between us and the larger economic areas of Alberta, but had a relatively short lifespan. Created in 1882 and absorbed into the Province of Saskatchewan in 1905, except the westernmost quarter, where Assiniboia Medicine Hat then became part of Alberta.

The earlier iteration of the Assiniboia Hotel was given this prestigious name, and built in the 1898 by Captain H.H. Ross on third street. This first Assiniboia Hotel was managed for many years by J.W. McLean, a well known local name. The hotel was one of the largest buildings in the early townsite, and was often touted as “The Best Hotel West of Winnipeg”; a decided dig against our Assiniboia District-cousin of the City of Regina, and its well known hotel scene at the time! The Assiniboia Hotel was also often called “Medicine Hat’s Palace” and was the “admiration of the townspeople” on opening day, December 15, 1898.



The ownership of the illustrious hotel changed hands over the years, from Captain Ross to Mr. Babb, until George Cantalini purchased the hotel in 1927. A well known businessman, Cantalini added the Royal and the Cosmopolitan hotels to his original acquisitions over the years.

Yet, tragedy struck the building when in December of 1944, almost exactly 46 years to the day from its original opening, the hotel burnt to the ground. The lot was repurposed as another well-known feature, when Harry Veiner built Hat Hardware on third street.

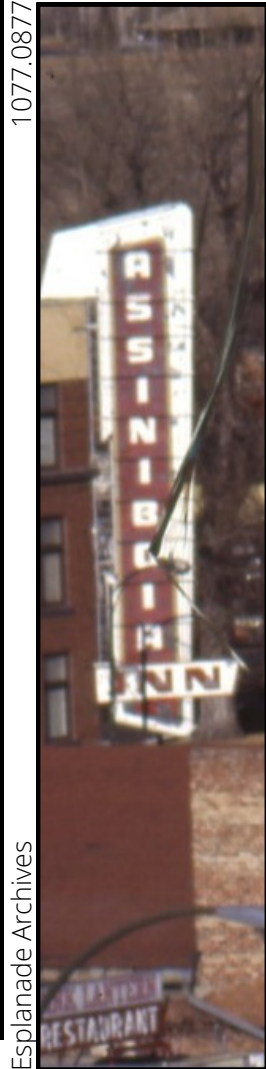
The Hat Hardware building still remains, and though the Assiniboia Palace crumbled, Cantalini rebuilt his hotel in the 1950s at the corner of 3rd Street and South Railway and the “New” Assiniboia hotel officially reopened January 7, 1953.

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Esplanade Archives



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Esplanade Archives

Submitted photo



Different iterations of the Assiniboia Sign - First offered as a “Hotel” and then styled as an “Inn”, the sign also underwent different colour choices.

The sign was made by National Neon Displays Ltd. out of Lethbridge, and the sign was first illuminated in 1953.

The sign was cut in half and removed from the site in July of 2024.

Images (left to right) of the sign in ca. 1953, ca. 1981 and ca. 2012.

After the “New” Assiniboia Hotel re-opened in 1953 under Cantalini’s guidance, the hotel enjoyed success as Medicine Hat’s premiere downtown hotel. Alf Cantalini (far right) is seen in the hotel lobby, reading the grand reopening newspaper article, January 7, 1953.

In the 1970s the hotel changed from a Hotel to an Inn, and the large neon sign was repainted. From there, the Inn was sold to Joe Warsimaga and Len Zenith, and was marketed as “Today’s good times meeting place”. The building changed hands over the years, but slowly fell out of the limelight it once enjoyed.

Now being renovated as condominiums or apartments, one can only hope of the grandeur of “Medicine Hat’s Palace” will one day be restored to its former glory, as it remains a cornerstone of downtown.



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Esplanade Archives

Mike Mountain Horse Story Robe

A Blackfoot Warrior's Battle Honours from the First World War by J Barrientos

Recently, the Esplanade was pleased to have a visit from the BBC as a part of a documentary collaboration. The entire building was abuzz with excitement as a piece from the Esplanade's collections will be featured: The Mike Mountain Horse Story Robe (pictured, right).

"The Mike Mountain Horse Story Robe has become a popular item in our collection because of the unique materials used to tell the story of one soldier's experience during the war," says Xanthe Isbister, Director and Curator of the Esplanade Galleries and Collections. "I think the piece serves as a great reminder that Indigenous Canadians were also on the front lines fighting for our freedom."



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Esplanade Museum

In Indigenous culture, story robes were traditionally made of buffalo hides using pigment to detail hunts, encounters, and other important events. The Mike Mountain Horse Story Robe uses pictogram-style drawings to depict twelve battles with the Germans.

Did you know the connection between the Historical Society and this special piece? The Story robe, or "War Deeds Skin" as it is sometimes referred to, came into the Esplanade Collections in November of 1951. It was previously part of a large collection of Indigenous material assembled by Mrs. Thyrza Burkitt of Lethbridge, Alberta, purchased for the Museum by the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District. Thyrza Burkitt knew Mike Mountain Horse personally—it seems he helped her in acquiring pieces for her collection. A description of the Burkitt collection written by Thyrza and Mike Mountain Horse in 1939 makes no mention of this robe; our presumption is that she had not acquired it before that description was written.

Mike Mountain Horse was member of the Kainai Blood Tribe who enlisted in the war in May 1916 and was wounded three times in battle before returning to Alberta in 1919. He said that at the time, the reason he wanted to enlist, was to avenge his brother, who had died serving in 1915. As well, Mountain Horse wanted to prove that First Nations fighters were just as adept as any other soldier. He remained in Alberta until his death in 1964 at the age of 76. The Story Robe remains at the Esplanade Museum in our collections.



Mike Mountain Horse in regalia, circa 1950s.

Image courtesy of Hill70.ca

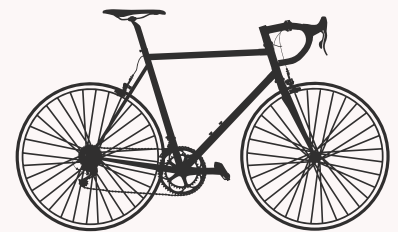
Membership Dues

Join the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District

Membership dues for 2024-2025 are now being accepted.

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



This Day in History

August 24, 1939

The News reported on a freak accident which befell a young cyclist named Herbert Reichel, aged 16. While riding, he lost control of his bicycle on second street, and got into an accident with one of Blair's taxis. It was later come to realization that the taxi was parked and unoccupied when the boy hit - and his knee had smashed one of the headlights of the car, leaving a deep five inch long gash above his knee. The boy required care, and a number of stitches for the wound, but was reported to be in good health.

Blair's taxis was noted as not requiring anything from the boy in restitution, and they were "happy to hear he was doing well."



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 Jenni Barrientos at jenbar@medicinehat.ca. The Archives are located at 401 1 Sttreet 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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