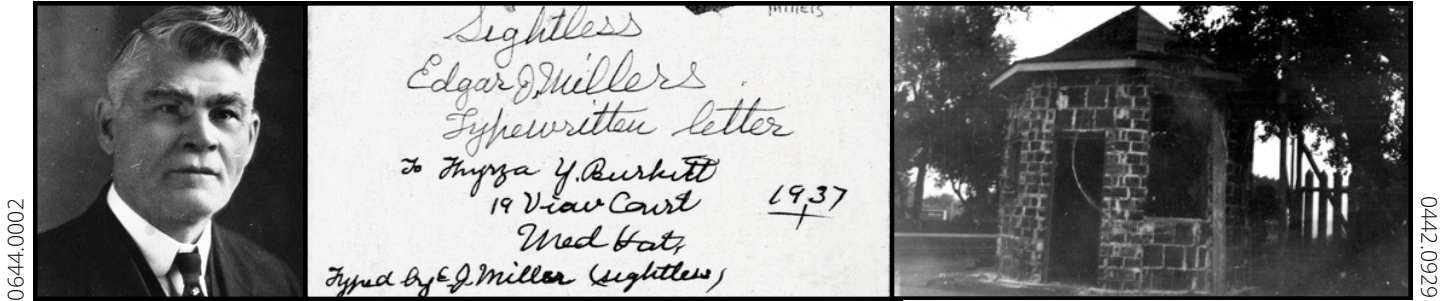


# HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Medicine Hat and District Newsletter

Thyrza Burkitt Letter, 1937



## President's Message

Medicine Hat and District Historical Society

Welcome to 2024 – let us all pray that this year is better than last.

We had a very successful year providing funding for three local and area charitable organizations. We provided \$15,000 to Etzikom to assist with their much needed roof repairs. An update – these repairs are not done yet, but these funds are being held until the entire required funding is obtained.

The second amount we donated was a bit over \$8,000 to Medalta which provided much needed funds to repair the roof of one of their very much used bee hive kilns. These funds and the work done will make sure that they are able to continue providing fundraising opportunities for the organization. We had a nice visit down to the bee hive to present the funds.

Thirdly we provided a cheque to the Redcliff Museum to assist with their on-going repairs. These were presented at one of our general meetings. As well, from completed projects, you will see in our newsletter that the Irvine Museum has completed repairs to their building's roof, thanks to our collaboration and funding from the Historical Society, received in 2022. We are pleased to have been able to assist.

We did something quite different for our Christmas Dinner. Our group have not been able to get 50 people out to the Medicine Hat Golf Course so we have been taking advantage of other opportunities. I spoke with the President of Friendship Force and we agreed we could combine our members for an event this past December. When combining with the Archaeology folk, we ended up with 78 people attending what turned out to be a very good and lively event with Neil Siedleki providing entertainment. A very good event indeed.

I sincerely hope everyone getting this newsletter will enjoy reading it and look forward to many of you attending our "Show and Tell" event at the Esplanade on the 25th of this month.

Take care everyone, hopefully you have braved the cold as we look forward to warmer temperatures ahead.

Best Regards,

*Judy Morris*

1 President, Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District

## Next Meeting:

January 25, 2023

@7pm, Esplanade Studio Theatre  
Show and Tell Event

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# Historical Society Upcoming Program

*Show and Tell Night*

*R.B Shepard*

Allan Jensen was a long-time member, including as a Past President (1985-1989; 2006-2011) of our organization who, among many other activities, arranged the programs for our evening events. One of his personal favourites was the Show and Tell Night where members are asked to bring their personal and family treasures and heirlooms, and to relay the stories which go with them. We would like to honour his memory by continuing the Show and Tell Night tradition at our upcoming January meeting.

Members are cordially invited to bring their treasures and heirlooms, and the stories which go with them, to our next gathering on Thursday, January 25, 2024 at 7:00 PM in the Studio Theatre of the Esplanade. Bring family and friends, if you like. You will be able to renew your membership, or encourage your friends to join us and learn about some of the memorable items which exist in our community.

With my ongoing collaboration with the wonderful Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District, I have no illusions that I will ever be able to replace Allan's interest, commitment or dedication to the work of our Society. With your help, we can continue to explore the past which makes this part of our country such an interesting place to live. Please also bring your ideas and suggestions for future programs and we will see what can be arranged.

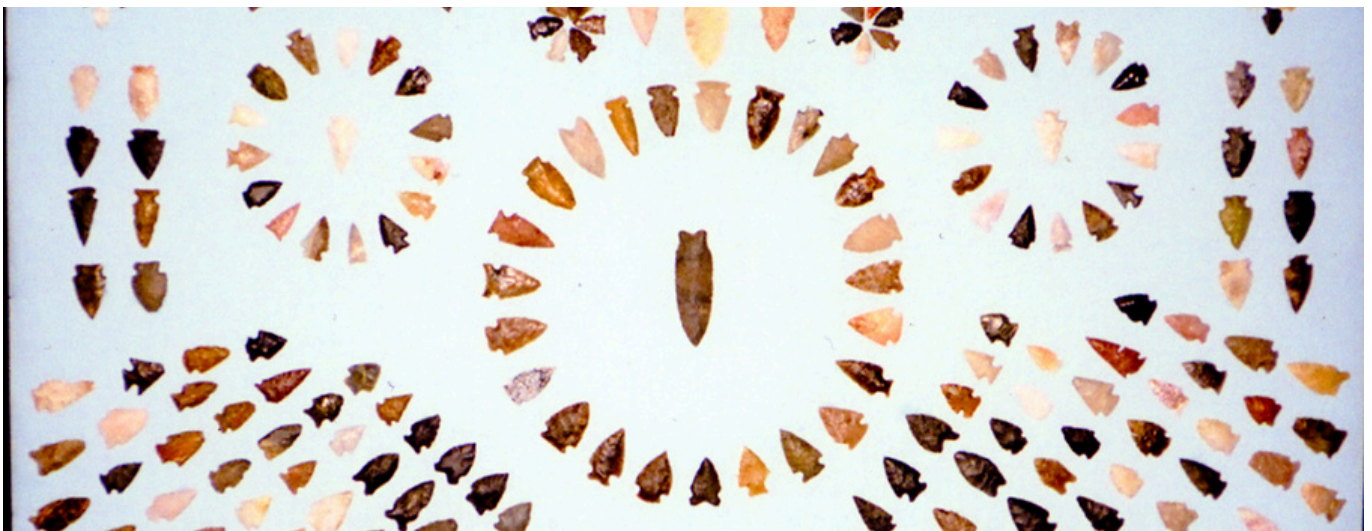


Allan Jensen, ca. 1987  
Credit: Esplanade Archives  
0527.0392

All the Best,

*R.B Shepard*

Program Coordinator, 1st Vice President; Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District



A selection of arrowheads brought to the Show and Tell event, ca. 2016  
Credit: Submitted Photograph, Allan Jensen

# Edgar Millar's Unstoppable Spirit

*Living as a Blind Man in Medicine Hat in the early 1930s*

*by J. Barrientos*

One of the most fascinating collections we have in the Archives are the items related to Thyrza Burkitt. Thyrza Burkitt (nee Holmes) was born in Hull, England in 1884. She emigrated to Canada at a young age with her family, and settled in the Cardston area. She developed a keen interest in Indigenous culture, and began to build a personal collection that was stunning in its complexity and care for its subjects. Instead of treating these subjects with a sense of "otherness" Thyrza revelled in the uniqueness and personality of the people she had a keen interest for. Not only was she a painter, artist and collector in her own right, she was also an author who created articles, plays and biographies on numerous historical themes - even compiling a small dictionary of Blackfoot words heard in the area.

She was a well known social feature in the communities of Lethbridge, Cardston and Medicine Hat, until she passed away in 1954. Her collection of items are housed in the Galt and within the Esplanade Archives. In addition to her love of Indigenous cultures, she also gave great care to the stories of the less-advantaged in the community. While going through our collections, one such item caught my eye, which was a letter given to Thyrza Burkitt, signed "from Sightless Edgar Millar."

Without Thyrza's special attention to the plight of others, this piece/letter may have been lost to time. But with her help, this donation peaked my interest, and forms the basis of this story about Edgar Millar.



Esplanade Archives Image 0053.0011

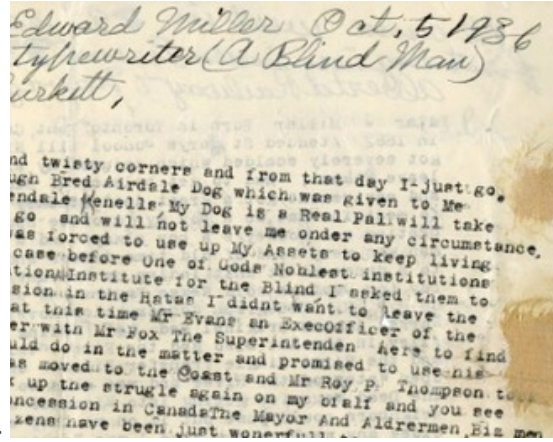
Edgar and Jerry, circa 1935

# Edgar Millar, con't

*The Millar Family's Connections Run Deep Locally*

by J. Barrientos

You may have seen my article in the Medicine Hat News which ran on December 28, 2023. The letter that I reference in that article was the same in which I speak of here - a letter which included small pieces of linen along the sides of it. This linen served as a way for Edgar Millar to navigate using a typewriter while being blind. He used the linen edges as a guide for the paper to ensure the words lined up on the page correctly. In his letter to Thyrsa, pictured to the right, he details his early life, and how he came to be blind, which occurred after contracting the flu in 1918.



Sample of the letter, linen to the right.



0053.0010

4 Millar with his seeing eye dog, Jerry. Outside their kiosk.

Edgar's family had been in the Medicine Hat area since at least 1883, when his father, James Grant Millar, was the C.P.R. Engineer who drove the very first engine into Medicine Hat. Quite literally the pinnacle of being a part of the early pioneers! Certainly, J.G. Millar was such a pivotal character to Medicine Hat's beginning that I could include an entire article about just him - perhaps at a later date.

His son, Edgar was one of ten children. One of Edgar's sisters, Mary Adelaide, died in infancy. Devastated by the loss, the Millar family donated a 925lb bell to St. Patrick's Church which now bears her name, "Little Mary Adelaide", one of the famous three bells in the tower of St. Patrick's Church, which still rings out to this day.

Edgar was one of the first people in Alberta to utilize the services of a seeing eye dog. His dog, Jerry, helped him with his job of operating a kiosk, located near the railway crossing on 2nd Street SE. Edgar's kiosk was open in 1936 to great fanfare, and the Mayor at the time, Issac Bullivant, was Edgar's first customer, buying cigars in front of large gathered crowd. Edgar Millar died in 1939, but his legacy lives on thanks to the work of Thyrsa Burkitt, and the collections of previously untold stories in the Esplanade Archives.



Medicine Hat News, September 21, 1936

# Irvine Museum Updates

*Submitted Photos by Marie Glock*

IRVINE MUSEUM BEFORE:



*In poor repair, the Irvine Museum's roof needed attention. Images of "before" the renovation to the left*



*And after! The Historical Society's monetary donation in 2022 has given a new lease on life for the Irvine Museum's roof*



*Looking wonderful, and welcoming! The Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District was a proud funder of this important local project.*



# Membership Dues

*Join the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District*

**Please note Membership dues run from MAY 2023 to APRIL 2024**

Therefore, you may be **past due** to pay your \$10 membership to the Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District! Your membership 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: **Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District**, 401 1 Street SE, Medicine Hat, AB T1A8W2. We would hate to see you go!

## *This day in History*

January 18, 1934

Local filmmaker, Luke Fandrich’s documentary “Your Cinema Needs You” is a new documentary about the history of the Monarch Theatre. Fandrich has already sold out more than 6 showings of the documentary, hosted at the very 112-year old theatre the documentary is about, as the Monarch lives on.

Back in January of 1934, the Monarch theatre (then only 23 years old!) was showing the Marx Brother’s production of “Duck Soup”. This movie was selected for preservation in the United States Library of Congress National Film Registry in 1990, for being “culturally, historically or aesthetically significant.”

**MARX BROTHERS  
CRAM FOOLERY  
IN “DUCK SOUP”**

Those humpty-dumpty, hooligan stars of the stage, the radio and the screen, the Four Marx Brothers, are coming back to Medicine Hat next week when their newest Paramount picture, “Duck Soup” opens on Monday at the Monarch theatre.

## 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](mailto: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](http://www.histsocmedhat.ca)

## Executives

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

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<b>Sheila Tiegs</b>	Book Sales
<b>Lynn Rance</b>	Membership
<b>Lorine Marshall</b>	Director-At-Large

Jenni Barrientos	Newsletter Editor
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