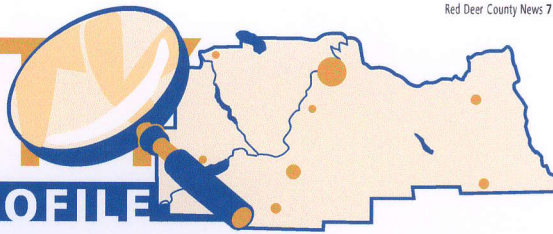


FOCUS

COUNTY

PROFILE



Bowden Pioneer Museum one of central Alberta's best kept secrets

by Melinda Wiebe

"We are one of the 'best kept secrets' on the number two," says Bowden Pioneer Museum Coordinator Mary McNain. She is referring to both the museum and the town of Bowden.

South of Red Deer on Queen Elizabeth Highway Two, Bowden was once a major trading stop between Edmonton and Calgary with a thriving business district. The town burned down, twice, says Mary. It is now poised to become a major economic force once again, she adds.

Bowden Pioneer Museum volunteers are celebrating a 40-year milestone for which they can be proud. The care and attention the volunteers put into their work is evident in every exhibit at the museum.

The museum was a Centennial project opening in July 1967 in the town's library, explains Mary. In 1984, the Bowden Pioneer Museum moved into the Hardware Store on Main Street, which was owned by Fred Anderson and later his son Roy Anderson.

By 2000, the museum had outgrown the hardware store and was moved to the curling rink building which was refurbished by Bill Hendriks and a team of volunteers. Now it's looking to expand again with construction planned to house larger artifacts under a roof extension outside the building.

Celebrating the 40th anniversary, along with the opening of a new exhibit, the take over of a local thrift

store and the purchase of the Anglican Church has kept the group actively engaged this past year. The Anglican Church is the oldest building in Bowden, says Mary. It is an exciting addition to the museum's collections. Presently, it is also the site of the museum garage sales.

The museum's purpose is to tell the stories and preserve the history of Bowden and its surrounding areas, says Mary. Its first exhibit began with the donation of

Gerald Robin O'Brien (Bob) Hoare's photographic equipment, shop sign and turn-of-the-century photos. Bob Hoare was one of the earliest photographers in the province.

The acquisition of Irene M. Wood's Avon Collection in 2004 necessitated a complete overhaul of the museum to display the more than 6,000-piece collection. New exhibits were created with the refurbishing including a representation of the Hoare Photography Studio and house, the Bowden Hardware/General Store and the Bowden School.

The newest exhibit, which opened this year, is called "Our Disappearing Landscape" which depicts Bowden's Railway Avenue in 1905. The display features a mural and train painted by local artist Eldon Walls, as well as three grain elevators built by Ben Hueven.

Another feature display is the Millie Meyers Ceramic Town depicting an immigrant family's journey from England to Bowden, which was part of the North West Territories at the

time. The story is just one of three million new citizens who settled the Canadian West. There are also military, Boy Scout, domestic, and distinguished citizens exhibits showing off Bowden's well-rounded past.

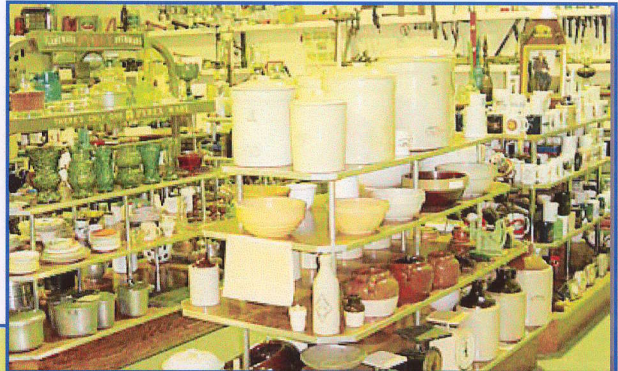
At the back of the museum is a thrift store set up to fund the museum on an on-going basis. Volunteers created and operate the store which "would not run without them," emphasizes Mary. "These five women work very hard and do just about anything required for the museum. Also, several men volunteers should not be forgotten!" She cannot say enough about the volunteers who contribute to the museum.

"We have lots of fun here," says Mary "It makes it all worthwhile."

The Bowden Pioneer Museum is open seasonally beginning on the May long weekend. It is open during July and August Wednesday through Saturdays 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Sundays 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. In September, the museum is open on



Mary McNain shows off the Avon gun collection
Sundays 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Tours and winter admission may be arranged by appointment.
Call (403) 224-2176. Visit the website at www.museum/anwc.net.



Hardware Store of the past



Elevator from the new Disappearing Landscape exhibit



Classroom of days gone by