



## Jasper-Yellowhead Museum & Archives

# Taste of the Century

Happy New Year and Happy 100th birthday, Jasper National Park. That's right, for those of you that haven't heard the news Jasper is celebrating a hundred years of being a national park; it will be a year of festivities and frivolities of all kinds

with one purpose in mind: to bring the community together in celebration of the unique history that we and so many others before us are a part of. One such event is the Jasper Yellowhead Museum and Archives' annual fundraiser, The Taste of the Town, which showcases Jasper's finest culinary artists and brings friends, families, and elders together to share stories, food and libations. This year, in the spirit of the centennial, the theme for The Taste of the Town is The Jasper Story.

The Jasper Story was the theatrical event of the decade or perhaps even the century. As Alberta was preparing for its 50th anniversary, the province was buzzing with ideas for ways to commemorate the Jubilee. It was amidst the jubilations that a woman in a small mountain town, known as Jasper, had a vision of a musical 'historama', a theatrical production that would span Jasper's role in Alberta and Canadian history. This woman with a vision was Vivian Kohar. Ms. Kohar took her idea and presented it to the Jasper Chamber of Commerce, the idea was approved, a committee was formed, and the rest is, as they say, history.

Through special grants and funding, Elsie Park Gowan, an accomplished and known Albertan playwright, was commissioned to write the script and lyrics to the musical numbers. The director was none other than Alberta's well respected Jack Heath and the cast and singers included Jasper locals who offered their talents and expertise to the production: The choral conductor was none other than Jim Heckley, of Jasper's premiere musical family; The set was designed by Jasper artist Phyllis Jeffery; Dave Basaraba was in charge of lighting and sound; Hank Penner and George Knight were stage managers; Bob Ayecraft took care of the 12 horses required for the play; make-up was done by Bette and Linda Jeffery, just to name a few. The entire production included 75 actors; 12 horses; over two dozen dancers; a hundred costumes; and forty singers.

During its first year the Jasper Story was performed in front of a sold out audience on Gordon Bried's property known as the Palisades. In later years the

production was staged at Whistlers campground. The musical numbers were pre-recorded during a 17 and a half hour recording session in Edmonton and the actors lip-synched the songs. This was not done to misrepresent performers, but rather to ensure the quality of the musical numbers on an outdoor stage. The Jasper Story stage was 120 feet long and was located amidst the natural acoustics of the Palisades. The natural styled amphitheatre was able to accommodate 450 audience members. The entire production lasted 90 minutes and consisted of three acts, which portrayed the arrival of Governor George Simpson, the fur-trade, the Overlander trail, and the story of the Grand Trunk Railway and Lewis Swift's homestead. The play featured characters based on some of Jasper's first tourists, such as Mary Shaffer and her guide Billy Warren.

The Jasper Story's first run lasted five years (1956 – 1960) and a second run was produced in 1976 and a third run in 1981. Each time, it was an instant favourite among locals and visitors alike and so, that is why it seemed fitting that The Jasper Story be the theme for this year's Taste of the Town. It is a chance to celebrate the people, the food and the stories, which remain an important part of life in the Athabasca Valley, even after 100 years.

Answer all corrections correctly and be entered to win a family membership (1 year) with the Jasper Yellowhead Historical Society which includes free admission to Taste of the Town and free museum admission, 10% discount at the museum Gift Shop, and the Historical Society's newsletter, exclusive invitations to outings:

Q: Who was the moving force behind Jasper's greatest musical 'historama,' The Jasper Story?

Q: Who was commissioned to write the script and lyrics for the epic play?

Q: What local resident was put in charge of conducting the chorus?

Q: How long was the Jasper Story's run?

Bonus Question:

Q: Name a local, who sang for the pre-recorded Jasper Story songs and the character or song he/she sang.