



**Jasper-Yellowhead
Museum & Archives**

Anything Men can do Women can do...too!

Most everyone has heard the names like the Otto brothers, Curly Phillips, the Hargreaves brothers, the Brewsters and many other guides and outfitters that worked in Jasper National Park, but how many have heard about a couple of gals who blazed the trail for

women working in the tourist industry today. Agnes and Mona Harragin were two sisters who loved horses and people. They came to the rocky mountains of Alberta to get work in the guiding business. Many outfitters didn't think females would be able to handle the rugged lifestyle on the trail, let alone having to wrangle a horse or what about having to deal with bears and cougars, or a disgruntled city dweller stuck in the middle the nowhere. Of course, the story of the Harragin sisters is not new to many Jasperites and over the years there have been stories and theatrical performances based on the stories of the two sisters; however, just when you thought you knew everything about those plucky Harragin girls, comes new archival material from the Jasper Yellowhead Museum and Archives.

The archives recently completed a series of projects, under the umbrella of a backlog project that was funded through the Alberta Society of Archives, The Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, and the Canadian Council of Archives' National Archive Development Fund Program. The ability of an archives to process its backlog depends on staff, hours and money, of course. Most archives and museums have a backlog. In fact, some of the larger institutions in Canada have backlogs that are 20 years deep. Fortunately, for the JYMA, these funds have allowed a large chunk of backlog to be processed and in turn, have made some never before seen treasures available to the public.

Getting back to Harragin sisters; Agnes Truxler, born in 1906, in Trinidad came to Jasper in 1927, with her sister Mona, from Salmon Arm, BC. She worked on the trail for Brewster until 1930, when she married fellow guide, Mark Truxler. Agnes and Mark had two children Vernon Harragin and Jacqueline Mona. Agnes passed away in 1988 and is buried in the Jasper cemetery. Fortunately for Jasper, Agnes kept photographs of the seasons she and her sister spent at the Medicine Lake camp and an autobiographical document written by Agnes, herself, in 1970 covering the three seasons spent at Medicine and Maligne Lake (1927 - 1930):

...Of course the beginning of 1928 stands out in my memory because I was starting on a new job in a new location. In the early spring of that year, I received a letter from Brewster's office offering the job of cook and hostess to Mona and me, also giving us the privilege of choosing any Brewster camp in the park. This spoke well of our work in 1927, an implication that was much appreciated. Now, this type of work was not what we wanted, but we definitely wanted to go back to the wild peaceful grandeur of the Rockies. I had worked so long and hard to get a job with horses and now, with my foot in the door, surely it was all worth another try. Both of us did a great deal of thinking with Mona finally suggesting that we just simply write back saying that, unless we could guide, we would not be returning to Jasper for the tourist season. Secretly we decided that, if we were refused, we would write back immediately accepting the previous offer, picking Maligne Lake camp. I will never forget my inward feelings when a reply came back stating that both of us would be hired on as guides for the 'Circle Trip', with our base camp at Medicine Lake. The 'Circle Trip' at that time was from Medicine to Maligne to Shovel Pass and on to Jasper, dead-heading back to Medicine, approximately 60 miles. There would be occasional side trips to Jacques Lake. Incidentally, some time later in that year, I learned that Mrs. Brewster had insisted that girls should be given a trial run on guiding because, she for one, would far rather make the round trip with one of her own kind as guide. She suggested that a number of other women would be of the same opinion.

Autobiographical records are documents that are high in archival value. They offer researchers a primary source of information. Part of the charm of autobiographical records, is that researchers can get a first hand sense of the author and subjects' character and personal insights into their life. If this little ditty has peaked your interest, remember, the Jasper Yellowhead Museum and Archives is open to the public.

Call or visit our website: www.jaspermuseum.org and rediscover Jasper's story.