



**Jasper-Yellowhead
Museum & Archives**

Fonds Memories: Continuing a Legacy of Generosity

Jasper is a town that has its roots in a strong foundation of cooperation and community groups. A prime example of such dedication can be found in the recently processed records of George and Ruth Prowse. These

records have been made available thanks to recent funding through the Archives Society of Alberta, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation and the National Archives Development Fund. The Prowse family papers include records related to many community organizations and groups. They reflect the great pride George and Ruth took in contributing to the community of Jasper. Whether it was job safety, health initiatives, the school board, or through parish outreach, many of the organizations they participated in worked towards making Jasper safer, healthier, and a more generous community.

For those of you who are not familiar with the Prowse name, let me give you a quick introduction: George E. Prowse first came to Jasper in 1926, at the age of 16, from Edmonton. He worked at odd jobs for the railroad; however, it wasn't until 1944, that George returned to Jasper, for good. By this time he was married to Ruth, who was born in New Brunswick, and the young couple had two children.

By 1944, George had completed his training as a fireman. He was also an active member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, an American union that represented railroad employees across the continent. The brotherhood offered employees benefits and protection against unsafe working conditions and representation in the event of labour disputes.

During George's employment with the Canadian National Railway, he saw the evolution of the locomotive from a coal eating, steam driven mechanical wonder, to a diesel-fueled triumph of modern engineering. He also saw changes in the working conditions of his fellow employees. George sat on the general grievance committee of the union for many years. His dedication to the safety and general working conditions of his fellow employees earned him the title of 'firemen's lawyer' and the nickname, 'frankly speaking'. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen eventually became part of the United Transportation Union in 1968, but the sense of kinship and community that was derived from the original brotherhood union

among early railroad employees has carried throughout the years and still continues today.

Both Ruth and George were active members of their parish: St. Mary and St. George's Anglican Church. George Prowse acted as parish warden for many years, while Ruth was involved in The Women's Auxiliary and later the Parish Guild. The Women's Auxiliary was an important organization. During times when women's roles in churches of all denominations were marginal, women's groups were often not only the heart of the parish, but collectively the heart of the community.

Among Ruth's papers are minutes for the Women's Auxiliary going back to 1914. The minutes cover notes related to hosting various events and cooperative efforts that included the women's organizations of other denominations in the community. The Auxiliary also hosted church socials and annual bazaars that raised funds to sponsor missionary activities on an international and national level.

Ruth Prowse, a registered nurse, was an active member with the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. Ruth became an important advocate for health issues in Jasper and was instrumental in securing a public health unit in Jasper. Included in her papers is correspondence that details the process and the hours of dedication spent by Ruth and fellow members of the Public Health Unit Committee and their commitment to lobby the health district, the school district, and Parks Canada until additional public health services were made available.

Ruth and George were both members of the Board of Trustees of the Jasper School District No. 3063. The Jasper District school board was the precursor to our municipal government today. The minutes offer great insight into education, residential, and health care concerns. It is interesting to see familiar names from these early days that have actually carried over and continued to represent the interests of Jasperites as part of Jasper's current municipal government.

I was struck by something as I worked with the Prowse papers, a common thread that can be seen in history of many Jasper families. The thread is that of community cooperation: the desire of residents to better our community. It is from this desire that self and public respect emerges and affects the way we, as individuals interact within the community. It generates a cycle that honours those that cared before us and this appreciation drives the

continuation of cooperation and caring, thereby ensuring that those who come after will be cared for, and the cycle continues. So, I encourage all Jasperites to visit the Jasper Yellowhead Museum & Archives and rediscover and celebrate the legacy of community spirit in Jasper.