



# CHINOOK COUNTRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Fall 2011

## THE BARRON BUILDING: CALGARY'S MOST SIGNIFICANT ART DECO BUILDING

by Irena Karshenbaum

The Calgary and District Chapter  
of the Historical Society  
of Alberta

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The Vision of the Society:

"to promote a greater  
understanding of Canadian and  
Alberta history in Chinook  
Country for people of all ages."

Chinook boundaries  
are from Olds to Nanton,  
from the B.C. to the  
Saskatchewan borders.



When oil was discovered at Leduc #1 well site, Imperial Oil executives invited the Mayor of Edmonton to a public celebration on the morning of February 13, 1947 to officially turn on the taps. That day changed Alberta's history forever.

Leduc was closer to Edmonton and therefore oil companies should have been headquartered in the provincial capital. But they settled in Calgary thanks to the chutzpah of J.B. Barron who seized the moment for all Calgarians.

Jacob Bell Barron (1888-1965) was born in Winnipeg to Joseph and Elizabeth Barron. In 1911, after graduating from the University of Chicago law school, J.B. came to booming Calgary on the urging of his uncle Charlie Bell. Bell had recently built the King George Hotel (later renamed the Carlton Hotel and demolished in 1978 to make way for the PanCanadian Building). In 1914, J. B. married Amelia Helman (1888-1959). The couple had three sons: William (1915-1991), Robert (1916-2008) and Richard (b. 1921).

Oil was flowing at Leduc but Calgary had virtually no office space. Workers employed by American oil companies found themselves working in basements. J.B. saw an opportunity. According to the oldest grandchild, John Barron, who as a five year old broke ground for the construction in 1949, remembers, "Grandfather was told the city is never going to move that far west."

Located at 610-8th Avenue SW, the Mobil Oil Building, as it was originally known in honour of its biggest tenant, also housed Sun Oil, Shell, Socony Vacuum Oil and Trans Canada Pipelines. Richard Barron remembers Picassos hanging in the plush Mobil Oil offices. The building inspired the term "the oil patch" because of all the other office buildings that sprung up around it and anchored the oil in-



THE BARRON BUILDING IN 1966  
*Courtesy of Daniel Barron*

dustry in Calgary transforming the city into the oil capital of Canada.

Modeled after the Lougheed Building and the Grand Theatre complex, J.B. created a mixed-use building with the Uptown Theatre on the first two floors, office space on the second to tenth floors and space for his family business and a penthouse for himself on the eleventh floor. The penthouse had a rooftop garden for his dog, Butch. The Uptown was a centre for art and culture showing movies and live theatre.

Completed in 1951 at a cost of \$1.25 million, the Alberta Association of Architects (ASA)

*(Continued on Page 2)*

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Shona Gourlay

The CCHS board has been on a summer hiatus; we will start up again in September. Luckily, there was the 21st Historic Calgary Week to entertain us during the break! Once again, the opening ceremony was held at the Southern Alberta Pioneers and Their Descendants historic building in Parkhill, overlooking the Elbow River. The day was marked by some wonderful family stories, and Mayor Nenshi spoke as well. We thank David Ballard, Joan Davis, and the SAPD for hosting this event. The "week" consisted of many interesting programs, and I was fortunate to be able to take in several events. Thanks and kudos to

Val Jobson and the many volunteers for a wonderful job, and for making HCW possible. Finally, many thanks to everyone who attended the various events and programs—your interest and participation is greatly appreciated.

A big thank you to Ron and Gail Kessler for undertaking the task of preparing the 2011-12 lecture season brochure for printing, in addition to all the other things they do for the CCHS. A big thanks also to Walt and Irene DeBoni for adding the program information, with wonderful graphics, to the CCHS website. The lectures start next month, on September 27, at Fort Calgary. The topic is "Talking about THOSE women," by Belinda Crowson (who is also the new President of the HSA). The presentations continue on the fourth Tuesday of every month (except December and March) and include talks on the YWCA and the Glenbow Ranch (a popular tour during HCW). Also, keep December 3 open for the CCHS annual Xmas lunch and speaker at Fort Calgary. Doors open at 10:30 AM, with lunch served at noon. Stay tuned for further details about tickets!

Last, but not least, a thank you to Bill Longstaff for all his work on the CCHS newsletters!

I hope you all enjoyed your summer. See you in September! -CCHS

## Winners ...

### Historic Calgary Week Giant Crossword Puzzle contest

Bernice Gaetz, Calgary  
L. Hunt, Calgary  
Jo Clipperton, Calgary  
Doug Brown, Calgary  
Jannette Daley, Calgary  
Terry Rishauf, Calgary  
Bernie Barbour, Calgary  
Elizabeth Klaffke, Calgary  
Mrs. Berny Hartfelder, Calgary  
Monika Gilliham, Calgary  
Stephen Cisecki, Calgary

Letters will be sent to all winners inviting them to attend the September general meeting of CCHS to receive their prizes. The Organising Committee of Historic Calgary Week would like to thank all entrants for participating in this year's contest. We would also like to thank the Calgary Herald for their continued help and support in publicizing this, and all events during our Historic Calgary Week.

Jennifer Prest  
403-289-8743

### Jennifer Jack Passes

We sadly note the passing of Jennifer Jack, a key figure in the creation of Historic Calgary Week and a long time supporter of CCHS. Her family has indicated that memorial tributes may be made directly to the Chinook Country Historical Society. Please forward any donation information directly to the family:

Ms. Margaret Anderson  
34104A 40 Street S.W.  
Calgary AB T3E 3J8

## THE BARRON BUILDING *(Continued from Page 1)*

names the Barron Building Significant Alberta Architecture. The rooftop garden won the Vincent Massey Award for excellence in urban planning for a rooftop garden. The ASA describes the exterior as being of "yellow brick, Tyndall limestone and ornamental aluminum featuring angled chevron and scalloped Art Deco motifs. The penthouse design was influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright. The Moderne element was incorporated into the lobby and interior of the theatre bar, echoing the Miami Beach hotel interiors by Morris Lapidus." The terrazzo floors have a double "BB" in front of the lobby elevator bank.

In 1981, at the height of the oil boom, J.B.'s sons sold the building to a Swiss family for what is believed to be \$6 million. The real estate market collapsed almost immediately after and the building was eventually foreclosed. It stood on the market through the mid 1980s to 1992 when a young banker named Blake O'Brien found himself the accidental owner of the Barron Building by placing a joke bid of \$250,000 at an auction. O'Brien lived in the retro 1950s penthouse with his own dog until 2007 when he sold the building.

The current owner, Strategic Group, a real estate owner and developer, stated it has kept only the original fireplace, flooring and molding in the penthouse while the rest of the building is in "redevelopment." Strategic has made no attempt to date to engage the greater community or involve the Barron family in the redevelopment plans despite the building's historical significance and it being Calgary's most important Art Deco asset. -CCHS

*Irena Karshenbaum is the founding president of The Little Synagogue on the Prairie Project Society.*

## SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD *(Crossword on page 4)*

### Across

1. Stampeder, 6. Angus, 9. Aah, 10. Nor,  
11. Davison, 12. Pro, 13. Yea, 14. Nelly,  
16. Hanna, 17. P.S., 18. Cuddy, 21. Notre,  
23. Trochu, 26. Era, 28. Roy Farran,  
31. Stephen, 33. Ten, 34. Ice, 35. Nolan,  
36. E'er, 37. Eagle

### Down

1. Stamp, 2. Ashdown, 3. Penny Lane,  
4. Durham, 5. Red Cross, 6. Alvin, 7. Gas,  
8. Sonny, 15. Lid, 16. Henderson, 18. CPR,  
19. You, 22. TCA, 24. Curling, 25. Oyster,  
27. Cohen, 29. Annie, 30. Niece, 32. Eel

# THE MISSION BRIDGE, FATHER LACOMBE AND THE DRUNKEN ENGINEER

by John Gilpin

The 4th Street SW crossing of the Elbow River is an important chapter in the history of Calgary. Before the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1883, crossing the Elbow upstream from its confluence with the Bow was not critical. The route from the south followed the Macleod Trail through Ramsay, crossing the Elbow close to where the 9th Avenue bridge is today. This bridge was built with funds supplied by the Territorial Government and local citizens who lived primarily east of the Elbow River. Within weeks of its construction, it was destroyed by a flood on June 22, 1884.

Father Albert Lacombe responded to the need for a replacement taking into account the needs of the rural community south of Calgary. The farmers wanted a shorter route to the railway townsite which was via a bridge on the Elbow below Mission Hill. Lacombe obtained a commitment from Lieutenant Governor Edgar Dewdney for the partial funding of its construction. Dewdney stipulated that the bridge be located at a point which would ensure that it would not be washed out soon after construction as had been the case in 1884.

Lacombe's efforts to build this bridge, combined with the subdivision of a portion of the Mission site, made Calgarians nervous. The Herald in particular saw the project as a threat to the efforts to build up the newly incorporated Town of Calgary. This suspicion led to a successful effort by Calgary to take over the project from Lacombe. The funds promised by Dewdney were to be used to build the new bridge near the old crossing. In March 1885, the Calgary Town Council, however, was informed that since a grant for the construction of a bridge within the limits of Calgary had been provided the previous year, it was only fair that the transportation needs of the residents around Calgary be given priority. Father Lacombe, who had abandoned the project in face of the protest, resumed his leadership role.

The federal Department of Public Works provided detailed plans along with a promise to help fund its construction. In March 1886, the bridge specifications were sent to Edward McCoskrie who had been hired by Dewdney to supervise its construction. McCoskrie made a number of changes which



Glenbow Archives NA-1753-51

MISSION BRIDGE ca. 1886-88  
Courtesy of Glenbow Archives

prompted the Federal government to withdraw its commitment of financial support.

Under pressure from Lacombe, Dewdney decided to proceed with McCoskrie in charge. McCoskrie, however, proved to be an incompetent project manager. In October 1886, Lacombe found that all work on the project had ceased with only a third of it completed. Construction materials were scattered about the site, some of which were in danger of being carried away by ice jams in the fall. The contractor had escaped after having been drunk for most of the summer, and the subcontractors and laborers had not been paid. Following Lacombe's visit, I.G. Baker & Co. was hired to complete the project.

In July 1887, Father Lacombe completed his efforts to facilitate the access to Calgary via the Mission District. He arranged to have a road graded between the Macleod Trail and the southern approach to the bridge. A flag pole was placed at the top of the grade to let people coming over the prairie know exactly where it was located. The wooden bridge was replaced in 1901 by a steel one and then in 1915 by the one currently occupying the crossing. This crossing of the Elbow made the Mission District a main entry point for people coming to Calgary from the south prior to the rerouting of the Macleod Trail over Cemetery Hill. -CCHS

*John Gilpin is the author of The Elbow: A River in the Life of the City.*

## "Calgary 1912," a New Peer Group Learning Program, with Don Smith and Pat Roome

Calgary Association of Lifelong Learners (CALL), is a new, not for profit, member led group dedicated to organizing innovative, affordable learning opportunities for people 45 and over. This fall, Don Smith, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Calgary, is facilitating with Pat Roome, Mount Royal University.

The group will look at many aspects of Calgary in 1912 at the height of its first big boom. Landmarks connected with this time period include the "Old City Hall" (1911), Central Memorial Park Library, Calgary's first public library (1912), the Lougheed Building and Grand Theatre (1912). Important events included the hosting of the first Calgary Stampede (1912), the establishment (momentarily) of the first University of Calgary (1912), and the drawing up of the "Mawson Plan" to guide the city's future development.

Next year, The City of Calgary is sponsoring CALGARY 2012, a pivotal year in Calgary's cultural history that includes the centennial anniversaries of some of the city's cultural cornerstones including the Calgary Stampede, The City of Calgary Recreation, the Calgary Public Library, the Pumphouse and the Grand Theatre.

Calgary 1912 will run for ten sessions, from Wednesday, September 21, to Wednesday, November 23, from 10 a.m. to noon. The first meeting will be at Lougheed House, 707-13 Avenue SW, September 21. Other locations to be announced. Registration is limited to 20.

To join the peer learning group on "Calgary 1912," one must first become a member of CALL (\$30, or \$50 for a household of two—and the charge for the peer group itself is \$20). Membership in CALL allows you to participate in all our activities for the year (Fall 2011 to Fall 2012). Details on CALL programs, and registration information, appears on our web site at <http://calgarylifelonglearners.ca/>.



# LOCAL HISTORY CROSSWORD

(Solution on page 2)

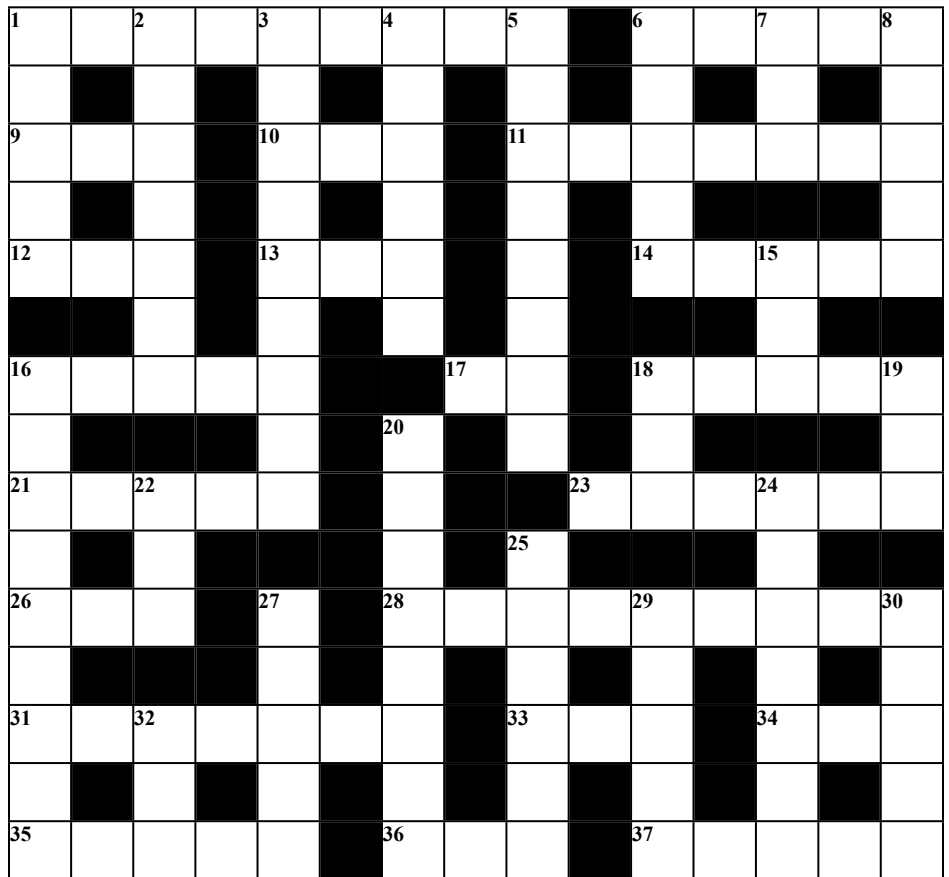
## ACROSS

1. Henry Burris is one \_\_\_\_\_
6. This breed of cattle is a prize winner at the Calgary Stampede
9. Ooh and \_\_\_\_\_
10. Founder king of Norway in Norwegian mythology
11. Calgary's 24<sup>th</sup> mayor, Andrew \_\_\_\_\_
12. Opposite of anti
13. A cheer
14. Ellen "\_\_\_\_\_ " Dean, Emily Bronte's heroine in "Wuthering Heights"
16. A town on Hwy 9, east south east of Red Deer
17. An abbreviation signifying an after-thought?
18. Calgary's 5<sup>th</sup> police chief, Alfred \_\_\_\_\_
21. A sight to see in Paris, \_\_\_\_\_ Dame Cathedral
23. Named for a French Cavalry officer; a town 62 km south east of Red Deer
26. Epoch; age
28. A Calgary alderman and cabinet minister in Peter Lougheed's government (2 wds)
31. Canada's 22<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister, \_\_\_\_\_ Harper
33. The Valley of \_\_\_\_\_ Peaks in Banff National Park
34. Cochrane's pride, MacKay's \_\_\_\_\_ cream
35. One of Calgary's most colourful characters of yore, Paddy \_\_\_\_\_
36. Ever (poetic)
37. British ski jumper in the 1988 Olympics, Eddie, the \_\_\_\_\_, Edwards

## DOWN

1. One time member of the CCHS Executive, Dr. Bob \_\_\_\_\_, Professor Emeritus
2. One of the earliest businesses to be established in Calgary, the J.H. \_\_\_\_\_ Hardware Co. Ltd.
3. Once a downtown Mall, named for a street in Liverpool made famous by the Beatles (2 wds.)
4. Lord \_\_\_\_\_, author of a report on the affairs of British North America in 1830s
5. A former occupant of the Lougheed House (2 wds.)
6. A singing chipmunk
7. An energy source vital to Calgary's economy
8. Once a partner of Cher
15. A cover or top
16. The \_\_\_\_\_ College of Business, founded in 1939, supplied secretaries for Calgary's oil patch
18. A railroad company that played a major role in Calgary's history
19. Personal pronoun
20. Recipient of HSA 2011 Award, \_\_\_\_\_ Davis
22. Air Canada's predecessor (initials)
24. A favourite winter pastime
25. A local gourmet treat, the prairie \_\_\_\_\_?
27. Calgary philanthropist and patron of the arts, Martha \_\_\_\_\_
29. The first female city councillor, \_\_\_\_\_ Gale
30. My brother's daughter
32. A snakelike fish

— Jennifer Prest



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**NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS:** The deadline for the Winter issue is **October 18, 2011.**

Please send your article and/or photos to Bill Longstaff at ballot@shaw.ca.

### HAS YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRED?

If you have forgotten when your membership needs to be renewed, check the envelope your newsletter arrived in. The expiry date is printed on the address label. We don't want to lose any of our members, so to renew, call Sarah Harvey at (403) 946-4650.

Associate membership	\$15.00	Family membership	\$25.00	Affiliate membership	\$55.00
Annual Subscription	<u>\$25.00</u>	Annual Subscription	<u>\$25.00</u>	(school, museum, library,	
Total	\$40.00	Total	\$50.00	historical society)	
Purchased together	\$35.00	Purchased together	\$45.00	Associate membership	\$120.00

Cheques are payable to The Historical Society of Alberta, P.O. Box 4035, Station C, Calgary AB T2T 5M9