

# Camrose

## Roots and Shoots

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Newsletter of the Camrose Branch  
of the Alberta Genealogical Society

Volume 1

No. 2

Autumn, 2004

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We are presenting the second issue of our newsletter of branch happenings and information about tracing your ancestors! We urgently need your input. We are convinced everyone has, or has discovered, family stories. It's just a matter of telling them so they can be shared with our fellow members.

Our meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month in the boardroom of Camrose Public Library at 7:30 P.M. New members and guests are always welcome. Genealogy is the fastest growing leisure time activity today!

#### Executive

President	Sherran Dermott
Vice-president	Norm Prestage
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#### Newsletter committee:

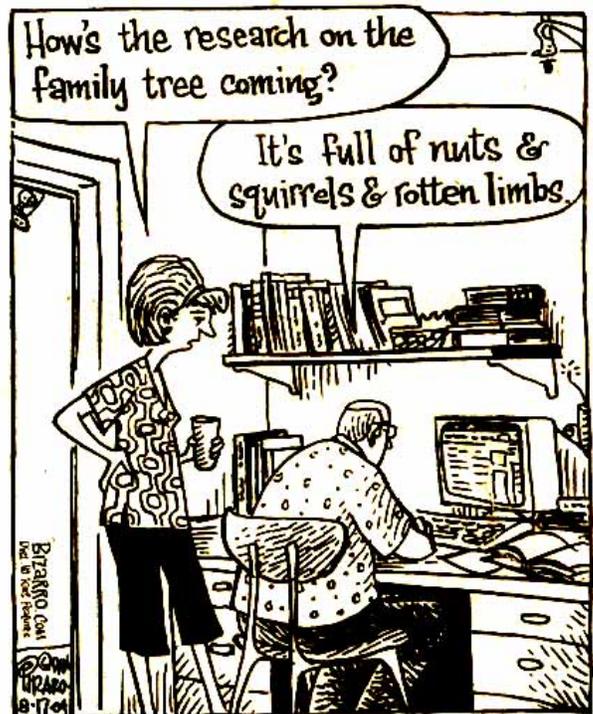
Fay Carlson	Norm Prestage
Jack Cunningham	

We are a branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society, based in Edmonton. Memberships run from January 1 to December 31. All members are entitled to receive each issue of "Relatively Speaking," the regular publication of the Society and all Camrose branch members will receive this Newsletter.

We are still very much in the learning stage. We urgently need and welcome any entries that may be of interest to our members.

**BIZARRO**

by Dan Piraro



#### **Some Countries that our members are researching:**

Canada, U.S.A., England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, South Africa, Australia, Poland, and Ukraine.

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#### **Genealogy Humour**

Epitaphs From Actual Tombstones... (from

<http://www.legacyfamilytree.com/Newsletter/LN08-09-2004.asp>)

**On the grave of Ezekial Aikle in East Dalhousie Cemetery, Nova Scotia:**

Here lies  
Ezekial Aikle  
Age 102  
The Good  
Die Young.

**Memory of an accident in a Uniontown, Pennsylvania cemetery:**

Here lies the body  
of Jonathan Blake  
Stepped on the gas  
Instead of the brake.

**A lawyer's epitaph in England:**

Sir John Strange  
Here lies an honest lawyer,  
And that is Strange.

**On Margaret Daniels grave at Hollywood Cemetery Richmond, Virginia:**

She always said her feet were killing her  
but nobody believed her.

**Anna Hopewell's grave in Enosburg Falls, Vermont has an epitaph that sounds like something from a Three Stooges Movie:**

Here lies the body of our Anna  
Done to death by a banana  
It wasn't the fruit that laid her low  
But the skin of the thing that made her go.

**The grave of Ellen Shannon in Girard, Pennsylvania is almost a consumer tip:**

Who was fatally burned  
March 21, 1870  
By the explosion of a lamp  
Filled with "R.E. Danforth's  
Non-Explosive Burning Fluid"

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**The Winter of the Big Snow**

*Contributed by Fay Carlson*

The following is a copy of a letter written in 1929 by my Great-grandmother, Amy Passon Ruggles to her niece, Leonie Stanke. She is describing her memories of the early history of

Manfred, Minnesota and the winter of 1880. In her own words she gives a vivid account of the winter of 1880 and how they coped with all the hardships.



Amy Passon Ruggles 1862 – 1937

**Dear Leonie:**

You asked me to write you what I know about the early history of Manfred and of "The winter of the big snow". Why bless your heart. I don't know much about Manfred 50 years ago, but with the big snow I was completely taken in. At that time I know that most of the inhabitants of Manfred were jackrabbits, with now and then a sturdy pioneer scattered about.

Fifty years ago, on March the 6<sup>th</sup>, we were married and two days later the town of Manfred was organized. I guess the fact of our marriage had nothing to do with the event you are now celebrating however we were then floating among the clouds on an azure sea of bliss, gazing down on the world below thru rose colored glasses. We had not yet come down to Terra Cotta, as an old lady said, that got mixed up in her terms. Terra firma, she meant to say.

Then our rosy dreams were dreams of the future; now they are memories, mostly sweet ones. We came down however, after a time with a big thud but we still retain the glasses, badly faded with

age, "tis true, rims dilapidated, joints weak, loose and wobbly". There, that describes us nicely now, but we were mighty pert in those days 50 years ago. Ours was a quiet wedding down in the gulch west of Gary where Horace Greeley has since lived, where he said, "Go west, young man, go west". There I believe I am mixed up with my Greeleys, and this one raised sheep and the other advised the goats.

Two years later, your town was completely buried under the big snow as was every other place in the great Northwest.

There now my thot has been derailed and I will have to back up and get on the sidetrack. That is all I know about your lovely town of Manfred but I certainly wish you and all your friends and neighbors gathered together to celebrate its 50th anniversary many more happy prosperous years of life within its boundaries.

Now for "The winter of the big snow", for of course I remember it with its thousand thrills and million chills. It began in the gloaming, as some poet wrote, and by morning everything was covered with a very heavy blanket of the beautiful. That was on 15th of October 1880 and on June 18th, 1881, that same snow was still lingering in the wrinkles of old mother earth. Of course during the winter there had been tons and tons added and drifted so hard that tunnels were cut through and under it in places. You arrived in the winter of 1880 and came to help take care of your mother and father. You did not seem to fret much about weather conditions in those days and now if we happen to have a little snow and you can't go everywhere in your heated car you howl like a Comanche Indian. Strange things happened in that long cold winter. All the railroad snow fences disappeared as if by magic and heavy oak piles got lost in the shuffle and not one word from the dear long suffering railroad.

Those were not all sad thrills we had that winter. Why, I can recall the happy little quivers that ran up and down my spine when Dad succeeded in digging our little jersey cow out of the top of the barn and our few chickens. How glad they were to be saved and put in a little 4 x 4 hole under our

shanty. Of course we called it "basement". It sounded big and made the hole more spacious. They sang and crowed and tried their best to thank us. The meek little cow from her corner looked over our household arrangements with great brown eyes. They visited us three days before the storm subsided and then were taken to a box built quite near the door, covered with tarpaper. I don't imagine they liked their new flat at all, the one they had being so sociable like and warm.

We made a lath grate to put over the trap door so the hens could see to eat and lay. One day I had bandaged Mr. Ruggle's eyes with tea-leaves to relieve snow blindness and sent him to bed. He started in the wrong direction and went crashing through the lath grate. I tell you there was some commotion in the underworld then. Did I laugh? Well, no not just then. I did not dare. The air was blue around for a time. These are facts but sometimes a person gets a little mixed up as to history. The other day a teacher asked her bright pupil, Johnny to tell her what he could of President Lincoln. Johnny thot for a moment then said, "President Lincoln was born in a little log house he helped his father build". To make a long story shorter I must say I never know when to stop when I get to writing. Husband says I am not a bit that way when I get to talking. Isn't he nice?

Well the hardships of that winter were terrible and it took stout hearts and real pioneers to meet them. The first of April found us on our claim at Webster with the larder nearly depleted and my stock of courage at a low ebb. There were no people at Webster at all that winter but Mr. Webster and two children, so April 1st Mr. Ruggles rode on a load of wood to Watertown, then walked to Gary and got my brother-in-law's team (to me the nicest that ever existed). After a days' delay owing to his being snow blind, we started for Watertown on the 6th of April, with no road, no sun, just fog everywhere.

Surely the God that watches the sparrows guided us then. The snow was very deep and starting to thaw some. We reached Watertown at midnight after driving all day, and in the morning started

for Gary in a blizzard. We managed to get thru by night but dared not risk the other mile after dark so we stayed at the Herrick house then West of town. In the morning the sun was shining brightly and we hummed out to the Roske homestead. What rejoicing! One who has never faced these trials can never know. My sister, Sara just walked the floor weeping for they that we were lost. She said in her agony, "If the worst comes to the worst, they can eat the horses". Just think of eating their only team, and it the team it was. Surely if there is a heaven for horses --- Jack and George will be there with silver bells on, lots of them. We were together again, her two babies and my one were rosy and well, so we were happy. What cared we if we had to eat boiled wheat with the skins on. Brother Charley strapped the coffee mill to a board and we took turns in grinding wheat for graham. Mr. Ruggles took some wheat in a sack and rode miles to a mill to have it ground. After that we fared all right as we had milk. There were no groceries to be had. No trains on the roads all winter and everyone had to live on what they had. For lights we used grease with a rag sticking out as a wick.

This was the way those early pioneers lived thru the "Winter of the big snow." Oh, how welcome to us were those first warm days. It nearly took forever for "Ol Sol" to make an impression on those huge banks of snow, but the long cold winter finally came to an end. The meadowlarks, harbingers of spring, sat on fenceposts and yelled at the top of their voices, "Hip-haraw for Mexico", and we thot so too. It did not take long for us to forget the horrors of it all and we could laugh at the funny things. Brother Charles often teased my sister about our eating the horses.

Spring was here to stay and on the 20th of May and we started for the little old sod shanty on our claim. We reached Milbank in time to get the first train over and were soon home. How we hated to leave that dear brother and sister. It was worse than our first parting. Trouble had drawn us closer, if possible. So dear, niece, this is all I know about that terrible winter with its privations. I would never want an enemy of mine to go thru like experiences.

## **Genealogy Gems**

I was very annoyed that you have branded my son illiterate, as this is a lie. I was married to his father before he was born.

I am mailing you my aunt and uncle and three of their children.

Enclosed please find my grandfather: I have worked on him for 40 years without success. Please see what you can do.

*Contributed by Bev Webster*

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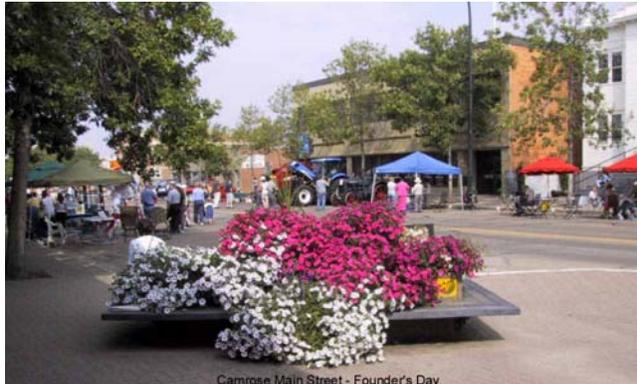
## **Founders Day**

*By Judy Anderson*

Our city (which turns 100 years old this year) held it's first annual Founders day celebration on August 19- 21, 2004. We began the celebration by dedicating a street in Camrose to one of our Founding Fathers, Francois Adam. Commonly referred to as "The Father of Camrose". Mr. Adam is the person we have to thank for our wide main street as well as the beginning of many businesses in our fair city. Many members of Francois and Laure Adam's family were present for the dedication. Approximately 50 grandchildren and great-grandchildren were in attendance at the opening ceremonies. This was especially exciting for myself, as I helped one of the grandchildren, Gerry Adam, with research on the history of Camrose, and research on his grandparent's genealogical history. It was wonderful to finally put a face with the a-mail address! After the dedication and opening ceremonies, a light luncheon was hosted by the city at City Hall, where we all visited and enjoyed each other's company.

The aforementioned "main street" was closed off to traffic on Thursday evening. This enabled several "booths" to be set up for the festivities for the next two days. Many of the shops had previously decorated their stores with the lovely red and white bunting that would have been used during 1904. The general idea was for the booths to create activities and sell products that would have been available in 1904 as well. There were

ice cream parlours, lemonade stands, homemade jewellery, fresh baked pies, children's toys and books that could be enjoyed by one and all. People were free to stroll Main Street (in period costume, if you so chose) listening to music, checking out the displays of machinery, or just plain visiting with one another.



Our genealogy club had our own booth, and were available to answer questions, some on the history of Camrose, while others inquired about their heritage, and how they could get started on their own research. Our booth included a family tree of Francois and Laure Adam, and a large picture frame that held several pictures of Camrose through the years, as it grew. One of our members loaned a cherished World War I Army picture with someone's soldier ancestor. Some of our members chose to display their family tree in chart form, while another member chose to do their family tree in a photo album. We had a guest book for everyone to sign, complete with place of birth and present location.

Friday's highlight was the mail delivery from Wetaskiwin complete with the wagon and outriders. This is how mail delivery was in 1904. Saturday's main event and Highlight was the fashion show with several people modeling period clothing. This event was used as a fundraiser for the CT Scanner for St. Mary's Hospital. Overall I think Camrose and surrounding district enjoyed this function and we are already looking toward our next Camrose Founders Day Celebration.



Myself (Judy) with Jerry Adam

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## **A Small Family Gathering**

*By Sheila Reesor Cunningham and Jack Cunningham*

On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> of this year we attended a celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of the Reesor family in Canada.

In 1804 Christian Risser with his six children, and their families, and a nephew and his family, made the journey from Lancaster County in Pennsylvania to Markham, Ontario. They came in six conestoga wagons on a journey which took six weeks. At the Canadian border the name was changed to Reesor, the way it sounded when they pronounced it, and all Reesors with that spelling are descended from those who came to Canada at that time.

The migration had been scouted out the previous year by Christian's oldest son Peter who came up by horseback. He bought a farm by exchanging his horse and saddle for land that had been granted to a soldier. There had been no mention of the horse's bridle in the agreement, so, much to the surprise of the soldier, Peter walked back to Pennsylvania carrying the bridle in his hand. The Risseres were Mennonites from Canton Bern in Switzerland. They had come to Pennsylvania in 1837 and soon became prosperous farmers. In Ontario soon more land was purchased - in the area just north east of Toronto - around Markham.

The picture below shows a cairn erected in their honour in 1930. It is at the intersection of

Highway 7 and Markham Concession 10, now appropriately named “Reesor Road”. Our daughter Susan, is standing beside it. Interestingly, the ball on the top is a meteorite.



Although many of the descendants have gone to other parts of Canada and the world, many still live in the Markham area and they have organized reunions over the years since about 1930. For the last fifty years or so, the reunions have been held at ten-year intervals, at the beginning of each decade. The last regular one was in 2000. Genealogical books have been published that have become bigger and bigger over the generations. The most recent, the one for 2000, contains some 24,000 names. It is also available on CD.

This year was special because of the Anniversary, and about 1800 “cousins” attended. The festivities were held at Markham’s fairgrounds and also at the site of the old cemetery, on Christian’s original farm and where Christian and a number of his family members are buried - on Reesor Road. There was an interesting program with music and speeches, but

a special highlight was a re-enactment of the conestoga trek from the cemetery on Reesor Road to the Fairgrounds - a distance of about 7 miles. Several wagons, one a replica conestoga, took part, each pulled by a team of beautiful horses. Our son Ian and his sister Susan are shown in the next picture, with two of the wagons in the background. One of their (Reesor) first cousins is in the dark costume.



Information for “self-guided tours” to numerous historic Reesor sites was provided, and on the last afternoon there was a dedication of a plaque to the Pennsylvania German Immigrants, at the Markham Civic Centre. “Reesor” is one of 69 names on the plaque.

A new genealogical CD will soon be released from this summer’s reunion.

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**The Newsletter Committee earnestly solicits contributions for the next issue.**