

The Peterson Papers Party

Wednesday, April 26, 2023

The Tom Peterson Room – Hinton Municipal Library

Good evening, everyone, and welcome! My name is Joan Melvin and I'm here representing the Hinton Historical Society. Thank you all for making the time and effort to join us as we celebrate this milestone achievement of both the Historical Society and the Hinton Municipal Library --- the completion of cataloguing and archiving the research collection of local historian, Mr. Tom Peterson. And how appropriate that we are gathered for this celebration here in The Tom Peterson Room!

I'm quite certain most everyone here this evening knows who Tom Peterson was and why he has a room named after him, but for those who do not, I'd like to share a little of Tom's own history and why we think his papers are important. After that we will have a few words from the presidents of the Historical Society and the Library Board, followed by presentations from the folks who made tonight's celebration possible. We will end with a slide presentation and invite you to enjoy desserts and coffee and to explore some of the storyboards that Tom used in conducting his famous historical tours.

Tom was born in Jasper in 1930 and lived there most of his life. Sadly, we lost him shortly after his 91st birthday in 2021. Tom was many things to many people. He was a devoted husband, loving father, historian, avid gardener, intrepid hiker and guide, gifted storyteller, and faithful friend. And by all accounts, a gentleman of the highest order.

For me, Tom was a close friend. I moved back to Hinton, my hometown, in 2006 and became friends with Tom and his wife Vi shortly after I arrived. We lived on the same street, and it was actually my dog TwoTwo who befriended them first. Ever after it was impossible to walk by the Peterson's without stopping for a visit. Always a biscuit for TwoTwo, a cup of tea with Vi and a wee history lesson from Tom thrown in on the side for good measure.

Anyone whoever met Tom would have to agree that it didn't take long into a conversation before he dove into his favourite topic - local history. And it didn't take long to realize that he was extremely knowledgeable and passionate on the subject. He lived it, breathed it, and above all, he loved to share it.

Tom came by his passion honestly enough. His mother, Constance Peterson, was a respected historian and in Tom's early years in Jasper, his bedroom served as a repository for Constance's historical acquisitions! So, from an early age he was steeped in the history of our region. Constance and Tom were founding members of the Jasper Historical Society in 1963 and in 1990 Tom cut the ribbon of the Jasper Yellowhead Museum & Archives in honour of both his mother's and his own contributions. Tom remained committed to uncovering and subsequently sharing his knowledge of local history throughout his life.

As a teenager in the forties Tom worked at a US Army Recreation Camp at Becker's Bungalows and as a fishing guide for Fred Brewster at the Maligne Lake Chalet & Cabins. Tom and Vi married in 1952 and four children followed. Ted, Linda, Gerry, and Dale. All of whom are here with us tonight. For most of his career, Tom worked as an accountant with the Jasper building company, Crawley and Mohr. The company has a proud history of building fine houses and such, but the one I find most interesting is the cabin they built for the movie filmed in Jasper in 1953, "The River of No Return" starring Marilyn Munroe, Robert Mitchum, and

Rory Calhoun. After Tom and Vi's children were grown and gone, they began renting the vacated rooms to young single women working in Jasper. As testimony to the loving care they received, a number of those women became and remained lifelong family friends. Tom and Vi cultivated a garden that tourists from far wide would come to admire and after Tom's retirement in 1990, he and Vi made Hinton their home where once again, the garden they created became a favoured stop on the Garden Tour.

Throughout all those years Tom was an intrepid explorer of the back country. You would be hard pressed to name a trail in Jasper National Park and surrounding area that Tom was unfamiliar with. He made countless visits to document historic sites and events and led others to discover the richness of our storied past. From the history of our Aboriginal peoples to the development of the Yellowhead transportation corridor and everything in between, Tom had an insatiable appetite for learning more.

I am happy to say that I was fortunate to have accompanied Tom on a few sojourns into the wilds. The first was the rare privilege of being invited to explore the Devona caves with a small group of adventurers and Parks staff. I was a little intimidated thinking that the hike might be beyond my capabilities, but I thought to myself, heck, Tom is an old man, if he can do it, surely I can. Yeah right. I obviously lived to tell the tale, but there is at least one person in this room tonight who may recall how I shook with fear and cried like a baby when I realized how out how of my depth I was. A similar thing happened when exploring Disaster Point. Froze solid on a steep slope and had to be accompanied back to the parking lot shivering and quaking with fear and tightly gripping the hand of a braver soul. The third time was a driving tour and I am proud to say that not a single tear was shed on that trip.

Traversing the Athabasca Pass, not once, but twice, climbing Roche Miette at 78 years of age, and countless other feats of courage and endurance, gave Tom a seat at the table with our early explorers. He would have been able to keep up with David Thompson and quite probably shown him the way to the Columbia! Tom studied the history of our local Indigenous peoples, David Thompson and the Fur Brigade, the Overlanders, the railway, the development of local industry and other subjects of historical significance. Essentially, all the elements that have contributed to our being able to call this area home. In researching these and other relevant historical topics, Tom was sometimes given special access to certain material and provided with privileged information by various people he encountered along the way. And so, starting with the foundation laid by his mother, and through all his exploration and accompanying research, Tom amassed the collection of research papers we now affectionately refer to as “The Peterson Papers.”

The Peterson Papers enabled Tom to co-author and contribute knowledge to several books, including *The History of Jasper, Hard Road to Travel*, the *TransCanada Ecotours Northern Rockies Highway Guide*, *Tracks Across My Trail*, *Highland Soldiers* and *Jasper Robson: A Taste of Heaven*. All these books are available from this library.

And I’m happy to say that for tonight only, friResearch is offering complimentary copies of the Northern Rockies Highway Guide. Thank you friResearch. You can pick up your copy at the door.

The information illustrated on the interpretive and historical landmark signage placed at various locations within Yellowhead County and Jasper National Park also came from the collection.

Recognizing that the papers were of significant value and should be preserved for future researchers, Tom donated the entire collection to the Hinton Historical Society to catalogue and ensure availability. In a moment you will hear how we went about making this happen through our partnership with the Library and Coal Branch Archives.

Tom's fervent wish was that museum curators, educators, authors, film makers, archivists, history academics, archeologists, and anyone else with an interest in history would be able to easily access his treasure trove. He recognized that with access to the collection historical organizations such as the Northern Rockies Museum of Culture & Heritage in Hinton, the Jasper Yellowhead Museum & Archives, the Galloway Station Museum in Edson, the Tipple Museum in Evansburg, the Grande Cache Interpretive Centre and the Yellowhead County Heritage Program, could more easily collaborate on projects, presentations, and exhibits pertaining to the history of this area. He knew that local schools would also benefit as teachers could easily access pertinent information when teaching local and regional history. Also, with tourism on the rise in the region, organizations such as the Hinton & District Chamber of Commerce Travel Centre could obtain and use information to promote an historical interest in this area.

We feel proud and honoured to have been able to make Tom's wish come true. We know how we have already benefited from his influence on uncovering and teaching us about our history, and we are thrilled to know that by having ready access to The Peterson Papers, future researchers can continue to uncover and share the colourful secrets of our past. Thank you.

Fran Hanington is the president of the Hinton Historical Society. Her roots are deep in Hinton and Entrance and both she and her mother, Jacquie Hanington, now departed, have contributed significantly to preserving our historical past. Fran was unable to be here tonight, but she sends this message, “The Hinton Historical Society is so pleased to have been able to collaborate with the Hinton Municipal Library to bring the Peterson Papers to a large audience. We hope that the papers will be referenced by those interested in the history of our area for many years to come. Thank you for coming this evening to celebrate with us.”

I invite Hank Smit, president of the library board, to say a few words.

Thank you, Hank.

Now I would like to introduce you to the people who have made tonight possible. Margaret Schultz is the Manager of Operations and Programming for the Northern Rockies Museum of Culture & Heritage; Devon Fraser is the Archivist tasked with the work of organizing and cataloguing the collection; and Shannen Shott is the Manager of the Hinton Municipal Library and Coal Branch Archives. Each of these ladies will tell you a little about themselves and the role they played in this project. We invite you to ask any questions you may have after each of them speaks.

Margaret

Devon

Shannen

Thank you, ladies.

In the Fall of 2018, Tom, along with librarian Dominique Unger, started a program here at the library called, “Hinton History Hour.” Anyone with an interest in our local history was invited to the library every other Tuesday to participate in a conversation with Tom covering topics such as, “What important survey party camped at Hardisty Creek on their transcontinental journey in 1871?” and “Why did the Iroquois from Eastern Canada come to Hinton & District in 1812?” The program culminated in the Spring of 2019 with what would turn out to be Tom’s last guided historical tour. The driving tour, starting in Hinton and ending in Jasper, was named, “Gateway to the Rockies.” Tom based the itinerary for the tour on the Northern Rockies Highway Guide and used some of the storyboards you see on display here tonight to tell the captivating stories along the way. You can refer to the itinerary in the handout beside the books as you make your way around the exhibits. In closing we would like to share a slide presentation of Tom’s last tour. The hymn accompanying the slides was a favourite of Tom and Vi’s.

Again, thank you all for coming tonight, and please stay for dessert and coffee. If you’re not already a member of the Hinton Historical Society, please consider joining us. We’re a fun bunch doing interesting and important work in the community. And please be sure to sign our guest book. Enjoy!