

## New tombstone marks 1914 grave

KEVIN HAMPSON/DAILY HERALD-TRIBUNE



*Wanda Zenner, president of the Glen Leslie Church Preservation Group, talks about a new tombstone for Grace Howard Parker, whose grave was the first in the Glen Leslie Cemetery, during a tour at the cemetery on Saturday in the County of Grande Prairie, 20km east of Grande Prairie.*

More than a century ago, a young woman living in a homestead on the Smoky Flats died after nearly two years of illness. Grace Howard (Brookbank) Parker, two months shy of her 23rd birthday, would be the first to be buried in the Glen Leslie Cemetery, 23km east of Grande Prairie.

A prominent new tombstone marking Parker's grave was officially unveiled on Saturday. It was donated by Gerald and Elizabeth Fritsma.

"I was interested in who was there," said Gerald, whose mother was recently buried in the cemetery. He felt the site should be marked with something bigger than the small granite stone that was there before.

"I said to my wife, we should actually identify it so everybody who comes to this graveyard can see the first burial site," he said. "The size of the stone and the imprint on the back will make people go have a look."

The new tombstone, which cost about \$5,000, stands taller than the others around it and carries the inscription, "First Burial Site, 1914." On the other side is a brief biography.

Parker and her husband, Fred, had come from Ontario and set up a homestead near the Bezanson Townsite, where Fred, a jeweler, opened a store.

Parker's untimely departure left behind a four-year-old daughter, Isabelle.

Wanda Zenner, president of the Glen Leslie Church Preservation Group, tracked down Parker's living descendents after the Fritsmas said they wanted to pay for a new stone. It took some searching, but she found them in California. After Parker's death her parents, the Brookbanks, raised Isabelle in the U.S. and her husband moved to Edmonton.

Fritsma isn't related to Parker, but he did note one connection; he and all his relatives will eventually join her in the Glen Leslie Cemetery, along with other people in the area.

"I wanted to do it for the community," he said. The cemetery serves a wide area between Grande Prairie and the Smoky River to the east and north up to Teepee Creek

Zenner said the new tombstone is a marker of local history.

"It is very important, I think, to note the first things that happen in an area. Every headstone out there has a story to tell, but it's always the first one that was buried (that) seems to just grab your attention."

A new sign was also installed at the cemetery last week, and landscaping work was done too.