

Glen Leslie Church – Heritage Award

Good evening everyone. What a wonderful occasion this is – and to hold the event at the historic McDougall Centre makes it even more special.

I am Wanda Zenner, President of the Glen Leslie Church Preservation Group. Our Group, consisting of 10 board members, was formed solely to act as a steering committee on behalf of the County of Grande Prairie with one goal in mind – the restoration of the little log building known as the Glen Leslie Church.

I'll just provide a brief history on the Church. In 1909, when land was surveyed in Northern Alberta and subsequently opened for homestead applications, droves of people from all across Canada and the Northern States packed up their families and headed north. One such family was the Leslie family from Ontario. Thomas, his wife Margaret and three adult sons settled in an area east of Grande Prairie in such close proximity to each other that the area became known as the “the Glen of the Leslies” which was shortened over the years to simply “Glen Leslie”. Once the settlers had built their homes and outbuildings, they determined that the Community needed a dedicated Church building. At that time, the Presbyterian Minister from Grande Prairie, Reverend Alexander Forbes, was holding worship services in the Leslie home. Reverend Forbes and Thomas Leslie acquired 10 acres on which to plot a cemetery and build a Church. A Community meeting was held in 1914 where a subscription list was drawn up with local residents pledging funds and or labor. On that list was the name of my grandfather and great uncle who each pledged \$2.00. Work commenced in the spring of 1915 and the building held its first service on October 31. Total cost for the building was \$468. In homestead days, a building had to be multi-functional. Not only did it provide church services until 1964, but it also served as the Community Centre and even operated as the school house for the Somme School District from 1918 – 1928. In later years, special events were held in the Church with the last being a wedding in 2008.

Over the years, the building succumbed to the ravishes of time and was at the point of collapsing into itself. With generous donations from the Community and with the grants provided by the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation and the County of Grande Prairie, we were able to restore the Church to its former glory just in time to hold a “Centennial Celebration” in 2015. Approximately 300 people attended the celebration which included a re-dedication of the Church with the Minister from the Forbes Presbyterian Church in Grande Prairie presiding, speeches by dignitaries including, Chris Warkentin, MP for Peace River; Gary Chen, Alberta Culture’s Heritage Conservation Advisor for the North Region; Leah Millar, AHRF board member and Harold Bulford, County Councillor. A log-sawing competition utilizing period-specific 2-man saws was a high-light of the day as it put Leah Millar and others to work. Local historian, David Leonard provided valuable insight into the history of the area. A Cemetery Tour also ensued once the bar-be-que meal was finished.

For my part, it has been an honour and a privilege to be involved in the restoration and preservation of the Glen Leslie Church. The building is a very important part of the Community – telling the story first-hand of what life was like in the early 20th Century.

After the culmination of the work on the Church and the Celebration, a book was compiled not only on the history of the Church but of the Glen Leslie area as well. I would like to present one of these books to the Foundation, as a remembrance of their part in the restoration of the little log building known as the Glen Leslie Church.

Thank you everyone.