

# SEXSMITH & DISTRICT MUSEUM SOCIETY HISTORIC SELF GUIDED WALKING TOUR



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The Sexsmith townsite was subdivided in 1916 by the Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway which named it Benville after Benhard Foster, the homesteader whose land the townsite was on. However, as the post office at the nearby Sexsmith stopping place, run by Kate Johnston, was transferred in, the Canadian Postal Service chose to call the insipient community Sexsmith. The post office had been named after David Sexsmith, a nearby homesteader who had passed through the area as early as 1898. Almost immediately, the properties along Railroad Avenue, soon to be called Main Street, began to fill up with commercial businesses, while Main Avenue, to the east, evolved into an industrial artery. Homes also began to appear along the other streets and avenues of the hamlet. The Hamlet of Sexsmith was incorporated as a village in 1929 and became a town on December 15, 1979.

### **1. ALBERTA WHEAT POOL ELEVATOR**

After lots in the Benville Townsite began to sell in 1916, the community of Sexsmith began to emerge as an important farming center. By 1929, when it was incorporated as a village, it boasted seven grain elevators and was the largest shipping point for both grain and livestock in northern Alberta. During 1938-47, it led all inland terminals in Canada for the export of grain and so took on the proud sobriquet of “Grain Capital of the British Empire.” When the main (left) part of this structure was built in 1961, nine such elevators dominated the skyline. This elevator was built by Dennis Johnson for the Alberta Wheat Pool, a collective to which many district farmers belonged, the annex (right) was added in 1976. During the 1980s, few wood-frame elevators were being constructed in western Canada, the grain companies coming to prefer large, concrete facilities located outside settled communities. This building is the last surviving wood frame elevator in the Peace River Country to retain its internal fixtures and remain on its original site.

### **2. NORTHERN ALBERTA RAILWAY STATION**

During the early 1920’s, Sexsmith became a major exporter of wheat and other farm produce. A modern railway station was warranted, but not until 1928 was the station finally built. It was designed with a long platform in front, and with sufficient capacity to accommodate an administrative office and telegraph in the southern portion and a waiting room to the north. On the upper floor, living quarters were provided for the station agents and their families. When the ED & BC became the Northern Alberta Railway in 1930, the station and its buildings were painted the standard NAR maroon. About ten years later, the station itself was expanded to the north to accommodate more storage space. The NAR station continued to operate until passenger and freight service were halted in the 1960’s. In 1999 it was designated a provincial historic site.

### **3. SEXSMITH GARAGE**

With the economic boom of the late 1920s, and the growing extent of mechanization in the district, there was a need for a full time truck and automobile garage, in addition to farm implement repair shops. In about 1926, Jack Neys established a garage on the corner of 100 Ave. and 99 Street which sold gas and oil, serviced vehicles, and eventually sold Ford products. About three year later, Don Innes established the Sexsmith Garage on Main Street, 4 lots north from the bank. It too sold gas and oil, provided service, and replaced Neys as the Ford dealership. In 1947, Innes sold out to Louis Stojan and his sons, Charlie and Jerry, who soon made the Sexsmith Garage the largest one in town, switching to Chevrolet products in the mid-1950s. With the loss of the Connaught Hotel building and

Case implement dealership by fire in 1951, the Sexsmith Garage eventually came to occupy almost half of the entire block. With the tragic death of Charlie Stojan in 1962, the garage evolved into the partnership of Jerry and his son, Chuck, who assumed full ownership in the mid-1960s and became village mayor. With the recession of the 1980s, Chuck closed the garage and re-focussed on sports vehicles, while his buildings were rented out and converted to other purposes.

### **4. MacEWAN HARDWARE**

When this building was opened as a hardware store in 1929 the business was then the second hardware store in town and was owned and operated by William MacEwen as the MacEwen Hardware. Prosperity was fleeting, however, and at the height of the Depression in 1934, MacEwen turned the business over to Huntley McMillan. In 1941, McMillan acquired title to the property and soon the H.M. McMillan Hardware was flourishing in the economic boom of World War II. In 1946 he sold the business to a former grain buyer, Jack Campbell. Under Campbell’s management the newly named Sexsmith Hardware continued to prosper. In 1958, Campbell acquired the Sexsmith Supplies Hardware and closed it down, becoming the only hardware operator in town. The following year however he sold his business to the Marshall Wells chain and moved to Coquitlam BC where he would become mayor.

### **5. PEACE RIVER MEAT (OLSON & SONS MEATS)**

In 1925, John and Mary Olson bought out butcher William Turvey. They purchased the two properties on Railroad Avenue, which housed a barbershop and pool hall, as well as the butcher shop. John was later joined by his sons, Harold, Roald and David, as “Olson & Sons”, and the business grew and thrived. The Olsons opened this new meat market and locker plant in 1954, adjoining the old one. It was the first stucco building to be constructed on Main Street. This was on the site of Nobby Clark’s Gun Shop which was moved to the back. A new abattoir was also constructed just west of town. In 2001 Roald and David retired after many years of service to the town and district. Olson & Sons Meats then became Double B Meats. In 2018 the building was sold and then revamped into Cowbella’s Cafe.

### **6. REXALL DRUGSTORE**

This building was constructed in 1956 to serve as the new Rexall Drug Store, replacing the earlier wood-frame drug store further north on Main Street. It featured the first red brick façade on Main Street. The Drug Store was co-owned by druggist Griff James, who already had the James Drug Store in Grande Prairie, and Bob Dowling, who served as the resident pharmacist. Dowling was a pillar of the community before moving on to practice in Jasper in 1958, where he would serve as an MLA and Minister for Tourism. His immediate replacements lived in Grande Prairie. In later years, the building became the Sexsmith Wellness Center.

### **7. DR. DICK McCRUM’S OFFICE**

The Dr. McCrum Office, constructed in 1942, is valued for its association with Sexsmith’s second and third resident doctors and as a link to the town’s long-standing medical history. Sexsmith’s second resident doctor, Dr. Lyman Gamey, arrived in Sexsmith in 1927, taking over the practice of the community’s first doctor, Dr. Robert Shaw,

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following his death that same year. Dr. Gamey moved his practice from the “Old Doctor’s Office” (Pondick Residence) (see item #12) to this location in 1942. Shortly after he formed a partnership with Dr. John Richard (Dick) McCrum. The doctors’ office occupied the north half of the building, while the southern portion housed a variety of businesses including: Co-operative Livestock Marketing Association Limited (1942), Don Wrights Jewellery (1946), as well as a telephone exchange (1949). Following Dr. Gamey’s Retirement in 1949, Dr. McCrum continued to operate his practice from this building, until his retirement in 1969. The building is currently operating as a beauty salon.

### **8. BIRD’S GENERAL STORE**

In 1921 this property was purchased by Hank Weicker, who contracted Jack and Oliver Johnson to construct a two-story residence on it. In about 1933 the building was leased to Bird’s General Store in Grande Prairie and turned into a branch of their mercantile firm. It was operated by Bob and Thelma Smith and known as Bird’s Grocery – Cash & Carry. In those depression years, customers were advised to Pay Cash & Pay Less. In 1946 the property and store was purchased by Cyvert Birkland, who converted the business into a clothing store. An extension was added to the back to serve as a residence. In 1953, the property and store was acquired by George Gordey, who converted it into a general store, while residing in the back with his family. In 1993 title to the property was acquired by Bob and Doreen Hall. It then was sold and became “Mix’s Mercantile Ltd.”.

### **9. RICHARDS-McNAUGHTON STORE**

Shortly after the Townsite of Benville was subdivided in 1916, the title to this lot was acquired by David Sexsmith, a trader, merchant and homesteader who had first set foot in the district in 1898. Sexsmith proceeded to construct a log building on this site which became the community’s first store. Three years later the property was taken over by Jim and Bill McNaughton and their brother-in-law, Judd Richards. They moved the log structure to the back of the lot and built this general store, which was then one of the largest in the district. The partners operated this store, and sold oil and farm machinery too, throughout the roaring 1920’s, the dark days of the Depression, and during the tense years of World War II. In 1946, they sold the store to Carl and Selma Larson. With their sons, Ken and Lloyd gradually taking over management, Larson’s General Store continued to do a lively business until 1963 when taken over by Herb and George Shields. The Richards-McNaughton Store provides structural evidence of the vitality of the northern prairie farming community of Sexsmith during the early and middle part of the 20th century. With its wide bay windows and flat roof, it is a fine example of the storefront architecture which prevailed on the prairies at that time. In 2020, the building was designated a municipal historic resource.

### **10. SEXSMITH HOTEL**

The first Sexsmith Hotel was a wood frame two story structure on Main Street, just north of Dr. McCrum’s Office (Item #7), built in 1921 by Jacob “Hank” Weicker. Three years later, Mary Hudson built the larger Connaught Hotel just north of the bank on Main Street, but, since the Sexsmith Hotel acquired a beer license in 1924 when prohibition ended, it garnered a greater profit. With the settlement boom of the late 1920s, Weicker decided to build a larger hotel on this site, which was opened on New Years’ day, 1929. A two-story, L-shaped structure with 16 rooms and hot-and-cold running water, it was the scene of much activity as it held the only tavern in the district as well as a restaurant. It was also the scene of many banquets, and was visited by Governor General and Lady

Bessborough on their tour of the Peace River Country in 1933. In 1942 it was acquired by Henry Ranch and Joe Pondick, who ran it until 1964 when it was taken over by John Thoreson. It burned down in late 1972 and was soon replaced by this building.

### **11. ALBERTA WHEAT POOL AGENT’S HOUSE**

Since the late 1920s, the property south of the hotel was owned by the Kirstien family from North Kleskun. Here, they built garage, livery stable, and entertainment hall. In 1950, they sold the property to Carroll Leonard who owned the largest store in town on the corner of Main Street and 100 Ave., just across from the station, where he lived with his wife, Agnes, and their two daughters, Norma and Beverly. In 1951, he built this dwelling and moved in with his family, but sold it to the Alberta Wheat Pool in 1954, where it would serve as a home for its agents for the Pool elevator #2, north of the existing elevator #1. The first agent to occupy this house was Everett Anderson, to be followed by Danny Rycroft and family in 1960.

### **12. THE OLD DOCTOR’S OFFICE/ PONDICK RESIDENCE**

When Jacob (Hank) Weicker purchased this property from Benhard Foster in 1928, it was for the purpose of constructing a new hotel, which was done the following year. Weicker had been operating the old Sexsmith Hotel on MainStreet since 1924. When his new hotel was constructed the following year, Weicker also built this structure which was to be used as an exhibit hall for travelling salesmen. In the early 1930’s this building was leased to Sexsmith’s only physician, Dr. Lyman Gamey. Gamey went on to attend to the medical needs of the district for over a decade. He went into partnership with a young physician named Dick McCrum and moved his office to a larger facility on Main Street (see item #7). At the same time, Hank Weicker sold this property, along with the hotel, to Henry Ranch and Joe Pondick. This building then became the residence of the Pondick family for 18 years. When the hotel was acquired by John and Margaret Thoreson in 1963, this became the residence of their family. Though the hotel burned down in 1972 and was replaced by the new structure to the right, the Old Doctor’s Office survived.

### **13. INNES RESIDENCE**

Built in 1926, the Innes Residence is an example of a typical Arts and Crafts style residence in the town of Sexsmith which was inspired by the British Arts and Crafts movement. Sexsmith possesses a unique and substantial collection of Arts and Crafts style residences, not typical of northern Alberta communities. The strong presence of this architectural style can be attributed to the early town’s large British population. The Innes Residence is valued for its connection with long-term Sexsmith resident and owner of one of Sexsmith’s first automobile garages, Donald “Don” Innes. Don was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1890 and immigrated first to Australia (1911) before sailing to Victoria, BC (1914) at the behest of his brothers William and Alexander, who had already established farms in northern Alberta. He then purchased a farm adjoining his brother in Grande Prairie. After serving in the First World War, he returned to northern Alberta where he eventually married Mary MacDiarmid, and five years later the couple moved to Sexsmith where they constructed this house and opened one of the community’s earliest garages “Sexsmith Garage Co. Ltd.”, sold to Charlie and Jerry Stojan in 1946. The house is also associated with successful Sexsmith grocers and business owners, Carl and Selma Larson who moved to Canada from North Dakota in 1918, first settling in Peace River before moving to La Glace, where they operated “Larson’s Store”. They moved

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to Sexsmith in 1945 and purchased the former Richards McNaughton Company Limited General Store in 1946 which they renamed “Larson’s”. Shortly after in 1947 they purchased the Innes Residence and resided there with son Ken until passing away in the 1950’s. It is now owned by Don and Judy Jickling and has been designated a municipal historic resource.

### **14. OLSON RESIDENCE**

The Olson Residence, built circa 1923, is a highly unique expression of vernacular residential architecture. The residence’s unique jerkinhead roof, the only example in the community, asymmetrical hipped-roof projection at the rear of the residence and one-time second story balcony on the northeast facade characterize this one-of-a-kind community resource. Once John and Mary Olson purchased the existing butcher shop in town from William Turvey and moved to Sexsmith, they purchased this residence in 1926 and lived here for over 15 years before moving to a farm just north of town. For a period of time the residence was used as a rental property for the family. This continued until 1974 when John Olson’s son, Roald, and his wife took title of the residence and retained the house until 1992.

### **15. SHARP RESIDENCE**

The Sharp Residence, built circa 1920s, is an exceptional residential example of Arts and Crafts style architecture in the community of Sexsmith. It is identifiable by its carried siding, hipped eave returns, double and triple assembly window openings, and decorative triangular brackets in the gable peaks and under the eaves. George Robert “Bob” Sharp and his wife, Dorothy, took up residence in the house shortly after arriving in the community from Saskatchewan. The Sharp’s lived in the residence from 1927 to 1951, during which time Bob managed the Sexsmith branch of Frontier Lumber. Albert and Eileen Manary purchased the house in 1951, with Albert then operating the Village Dray. They resided there until 1964, raising their four children, Billy, Fay, Darlene, and Colleen, in the burgeoning community.

### **16. CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH**

With a large number of Norwegian immigrants settling in and around Sexsmith, it was inevitable that a Lutheran congregation would become a part of the early community. In 1922, services began to be conducted in private homes and the community hall. Shortly thereafter, the Benville Norweigan Lutheran Congregation was formed. Finally in 1935, a resident pastor, K.A. Knutson was assigned to Sexsmith with the purpose of reorganizing the congregation and building a church. The first service was conducted on July 25<sup>th</sup>. 1937. Two years later, the Christ Lutheran Congregation was incorporated and this building constructed. At the same time, the Zion Lutheran Ladies Aid was formed to raise funds and assist in church activities. In 1959 the church was renovated and moved onto its present foundation with a basement.

### **17. SEXSMITH MATERNITY HOME**

From 1921 to 1958, several structures housed the Maternity Hospital for Sexsmith and area. These buildings were operated by Johanna Haakstad, a native Norwegian whose family had settled near La Glace. Already proficient in midwifery, Johanna resumed her calling in Sexsmith in 1921 with Dr. Robert Shaw. Johanna moved three times over the years as her busy practice outgrew each residence. Finally, in 1941, she purchased this dwelling which

had been constructed a few years earlier for Roy and Mabel Roberts. It would serve as the district Maternity Hospital until Johanna’s retirement in 1958. By this time over 3,000 children had been brought into the world under her care, earning her the title “Nightingale of the North”. Johanna passed away in 1963, leaving many of “Jo’s babies” as her legacy. Artifacts from the Maternity Home can be viewed in the Paszkowski House (see item #24).

### **18. ST. MARY’S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Known officially as “The Church of the Immaculate Conception of Mary”, this church was designed and built by Father Francis Dales in 1954. It replaced an earlier wood frame structure, built in 1917 in Clairmont, and was moved to this site in 1920. In 1954, it was moved to Belloy to make way for the construction of this building. Father Dales was a strong community leader who also built and presided over the straw church at Bad Heart, now a provincial historic resource. The earlier wooden church was eventually returned to Sexsmith and located near the 1921 Frontier lumber yard, but both structures burned down in 2009.

### **19. EMMANUEL ANGLICAN CHURCH MANSE**

This house was constructed at some point during the population boom of the later 1920s, when Sexsmith emerged as a village with close to 300 people. In the late 1940s, it was occupied by Paul and Elise Wold and their children, Melvin and Marie, but, in 1949, was acquired by the Christ Church Lutheran congregation and became the home of its ministers, who served the entire district. The first Church occupants were Reverend Martin Haave and family. At the time, the Anglican Church Manse was a smaller dwelling next to the church across the street, but, in 1963, the Anglican Diocese purchased this structure to serve as the district manse. It remained in the hands of the Diocese until 2011, when the Diocese sold its property on 101 Avenue.

### **20. EMMANUEL ANGLICAN CHURCH**

Though a good number of the first settlers in the Sexsmith district were of the Anglican faith, it was not until 1936 that the first Anglican Church was built. Prior to then, services were conducted in private homes or in the local Masonic temple. In 1928, the Women’s Auxiliary began to raise money for parish activities. When Reverend Phillip Beattie arrived in the summer of 1935, plans were soon underway for a church building on this site, which was purchased from T.A. Moodie. Work began under the supervision of Jack Leonard, and in September, the cornerstone of the Parish Church of Emmanuel was laid. Most of the labor was volunteer, and many of the furnishings were donated by local parishioners. The first service was conducted by Reverend H.E. Webb on Christmas Day, 1936. Webb also became the first resident priest. The Church continued to serve the community and district until the 1990s. In 2011, it was sold to the Sexsmith Museum Society.

### **21. DR. ROBERT SHAW RESIDENCE**

This house was built circa 1920 and is another example of the Arts and Crafts style residences that were built in Sexsmith around this time. It is valued for its connection with the first resident doctor in the area, Dr. Robert Norman Shaw. Born in Woodburn, Ontario in 1880, Shaw received his degree in medicine from the University of Toronto in 1905. After first practicing in Ontario, he moved to northern Alberta in 1911 as part of the Laurier government’s call to homestead in the “Last Great West”. He sought hard work and adventure, in lieu of practicing

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medicine which included working as the foreman on a road crew carving out the Edson Trail to Grande Prairie, as a labourer building a ferry for Dunvegan, working at the Hudson's Bay Company's Sturgeon Lake Trading Post and travelling to Hudson Hope seeking gold. He came back to northern Alberta in 1913 and opened a drug store in Grande Prairie with pharmacist S. J. Shuttlesworth until Shaw sold his portion in 1915 and moved to Spirit River to homestead. There he met and married his wife Ann Anderson, whose family operated a stopping house just north of Sexsmith. He established a medical practice in Spirit River to supplement his farming income before moving to Sexsmith in 1919. He then established a medical practice in Sexsmith and formed a partnership with pharmacist Bert Smith, and opened a drug store in the community where he also based his medical practice. Dr. Shaw also worked closely with midwife Johanna Haakstad, the "Nightingale of the north" to open a centralized maternity home in Sexsmith (see item #17).

### **22. NELS JOHNSON RESIDENCE**

This dwelling was built in 1921 and would serve as the home of blacksmith Nels Johnson and his wife, Charlotte, until 1971. Born in Sweden, Johnson had come to Canada in 1909 and worked as a blacksmith in Edson before moving to the Sexsmith district in 1920. In 1921, he was employed by Dave Bozarth, the first blacksmith in town, and, in 1927, took over the blacksmith shop and ran it until 1974. When he married Charlotte, "Lotte", Burns in 1930, they moved into this dwelling, which, from time-to-time, served as a home-away-from-home for her three children and many grandchildren from a previous marriage. In 1976, it was acquired by Lotte's daughter, Inez. Like the house just to the north, it represented the Arts and Crafts style of domestic architecture which became common in Sexsmith.

### **23. ANDERSON HALL**

This was once the location of the Frontier Lumber Company. It was founded in 1918, and Frontier Lumber yards were opened in Grande Prairie, Spirit River, and Sexsmith. The yard in Sexsmith was located at this site, with a small office in front and an open-air storage to the right. The first agents included Al Degere and Allan Foster, while rough lumber supplies were obtained from various district sawmills. During the late 1920's the Sexsmith district experienced rapid expansion, and so this combined office and storage facility was expanded. Enclosed storage could accommodate treated lumber, most of which was imported. By 1963, the larger facilities in Grande Prairie were rendering this operation redundant, and so it was closed. In 1993, it was declared a provincial historic site. The building was acquired by Sexsmith & District Museum Society in 2002, however in 2009 it was destroyed by a fire. Anderson Hall was then constructed, with an expansion in the back completed in 2019.

### **24. PASZKOWSKI RESIDENCE**

The Paszkowski House, which was built by Emil Swensen between 1926 to 1934, was home to the Swensen family until 1946, and then, briefly, to Bill and Grace Leonard and family. The farm and house were purchased by Walter and Mannie Paszkowski in 1947. The house became home to their family: Jean, Mary and Walter Jr. and they farmed that land for many years. The Hon. Walter Paszkowski Jr. served with distinction as MLA for the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency from 1989 until 2001, becoming Ministers of Agriculture, Transportation, and

Municipal Affairs. In the fall of 1996, the Paszkowski House was generously donated to the Sexsmith & District Museum Society by the Paszkowski family and stands as an excellent example of a 1930's farm house.

### **25. SEXSMITH BLACKSMITH SHOP**

Shortly after the subdivision of the Benville Townsite in 1916, a number of commercial buildings began to appear. One of the first was the blacksmith shop. It was constructed and first operated by Dave Bozarth, who lived in the back with his family until 1920. The Bozarth's took in a young Swedish boarder named Nels Johnson, who had earlier undertaken blacksmithing in Edson. Johnson became his chief blacksmith. In 1927, Bozarth sold his blacksmith shop to Johnson, who would continue to operate it until 1974, when it was purchased by Danny Shannon. Danny retained this structure and its equipment intact until 1986, when it was acquired by the Town of Sexsmith. By this time, its restoration had taken place under the auspices of the Sexsmith Museum Society, which continues to maintain and interpret it. The Sexsmith Blacksmith Shop is the oldest building in the community and was designated a provincial historic site in the early 1980's.