

Chinook Arch

January 2026
Volume 8 Issue 1



ALBERTA FAMILY
HISTORIES SOCIETY

Supporting worldwide family history research

NEXT SOCIETY MEETING

Monday, January 12, 2026

Topic: Start, Search, Discover: Genealogy Essentials

Speaker: Christine Hayes

Location: In-person and Zoom (register on our website calendar)

Time: 7 – 9 pm

FUTURE MEETINGS

Monday, January 19, 2026

Topic: Chit Chat Session

Hosts: Linda Murray and Kelly Southworth

Location: Zoom (register on website calendar)

Time: 7 – 8:30 pm

Monday, February 9, 2026

Topic: Researching in British Columbia

Speaker: Gord McBean

Location: In-person and Zoom (register on our website calendar)

Time: 7 – 9 pm

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

President's Message	2
The Diary of Mary (Heard) Forster	3
Special Interest Groups	4
Resource Centre Highlights	5
AFHS Settlers Project	6
Upcoming Events	7
About Our Society	8

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

Watch for our newsletter, *Chinook Arch*, distributed monthly by email from September to June.

We are looking for short articles with copyright-free pictures. Favourite relatives, fond family memories, research tips and tricks, new genealogy technology you love, book reviews or any related topics are accepted.

Editor: Amber Godfrey

Email: chinookarch@afhs.ab.ca

President's Message

Gordon Lane

I hope you all enjoyed the holiday season with family and friends. And if you had time away from work, hopefully you managed to squeeze in a bit more research too!

2025 was a good year for AFHS. One highlight was the move to our new location. We experienced increased publicity including Cemetery Project interviews which led to requests from various small community newspapers for more information. Ron Gilmore has been a champion in our marketing efforts. Recently he has been reaching out to a multitude of institutions across Canada and the United States promoting our extensive Speaker Bureau. Two of our speakers have already been booked!

We are still working on the Strategic plan for 2026. Our meeting was lengthy and covered many topics around the future of the Society. This coming year we will be hosting our bi-annual conference, as well as more outreach programs. The AFHS Board has already approved the budget for 2026.

At the last Board Meeting, we were happy to hear that Roy expects to have enough time to still support the websites.



Without all of our volunteers giving of their time, the Society would not be what it is today. Thank you to all our regular volunteers! The six ladies in the photo are our Library Committee volunteers.

We regret to inform our members that our Treasurer, Larry Stone, passed away on Saturday, January 3. Larry was a kind, dedicated and respected member of the Board.

He will be truly missed.

We do not have any details about his funeral at this time.



The Forsters of Berry Creek Horse Ranch

Shelley Lunney

When Alberta pioneer Mary Forster died in 1942, the *Hanna Herald* published some excerpts from her personal diary relating her family's experience at Berry Creek, Alberta. I used that and other newspaper articles about the Forster family to write this article.

Mary Elizabeth Heard was born near Simcoe, Ontario, on July 24, 1853 and married John William Forster on December 15, 1872. He was born in Toronto on October 31, 1848. Four children were born to the couple: William, Gordon (later the MLA for Hand Hills), Hugh and Laura. They farmed near Hamilton, Ontario for many years before John and two of his sons came to Alberta in 1903 and established the Berry Creek Horse Ranch at the forks of Berry and Dead Fish Creeks, 35 miles north of Brooks, Alberta.

The entire Forster family took up permanent residence at the ranch in 1904. The land was wide-open prairie, unfenced for hundreds of miles. A large home with seven bedrooms was built to accommodate the family. Despite the remote location, their housewarming at the ranch house brought sixty-five neighbours from along the Red Deer River, some from up to sixty miles away! Supper was followed by a night of dancing and then breakfast before the revellers departed for home.

The ranch was known for its hospitality. Mary's diary recounted one such occasion when the boys from the ranch played in a hockey game with the boys from the Red Deer River team. When the weather became stormy, thirty-five boys bedded down for the night. A picture taken at noon the next day showed thirty-three still there and most stayed another night.



In 1905, a detachment of the North West Mounted Police was stationed at the ranch and continued there until 1917. In 1942, the log barracks built for the detachment by John Forster was still standing. Over the years, many dangerous horse and cattle rustlers were chained to rings on the wall.

The ranch continued to be developed, with Mary taking an active part in its success. Beginning with a small group of purebred Shire mares and a stallion imported from England, they produced the largest purebred Shire herd in Canada. J. W. Forster and Sons Shire horses won many championships on the Western Fair Circuit. In 1906, 70 heifers were purchased to begin cattle ranching, but foot rot decimated the herd. It was decided that horses were a safer investment.



Shire Horse, photo by F. Babbage 1906

John died in Edmonton on April 19, 1927, followed by Mary on January 9, 1942. They are buried in Edmonton Municipal Cemetery. Their son Hugh took over the ranch operations until his passing in Calgary on April 6, 1964.

When the Forsters first arrived, there wasn't a settler for one hundred miles to the north and east of the ranch. Eventually, homesteaders filled every available quarter until dry years saw an exodus. When Hugh Forster passed away in 1964, the *Calgary Albertan* said his passing "was the passing of an era. The days of the horse ranches are gone forever in southern Alberta."

Special Interest Groups

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGs) are a major benefit of being an AFHS member. The small-group setting is the ideal place to expand your knowledge and share your own family history challenges. SIGs provide the opportunity to ask questions, obtain help from more experienced researchers and get to know other AFHS members.

If you are an AFHS member and would like to be added to a SIG distribution list or if you would like to attend a SIG meeting as a guest before joining AFHS, please contact communications@afhs.ab.ca

SIGs are now being held in three formats: in-person only, Zoom only or a hybrid version of both. Check the calendar on our website for up-to-date information or email the SIG leader. The SIGs do not meet during July and August.

SIG GROUP	NEXT MEETING	TIME	CONTACT
BASICS	Saturday, January 31	10 am – Noon	basics@afhs.ab.ca
CELTIC (Irish/Scots)	Saturday, January 24	10 am – Noon	celticsig@afhs.ab.ca
DIGITAL GENEALOGY	Saturday, January 10	10 am – Noon	familygenes@afhs.ab.ca
DNA	Sunday, January 11	12:30 – 2:30 pm	dnasig@afhs.ab.ca
ENGLISH/WELSH	Saturday, January 17	10 am – Noon	englishwelshsig@afhs.ab.ca
FAMILY TREE MAKER	Saturday, February 7	10 am – Noon	ftmsig@afhs.ab.ca
LEGACY	Tuesday, January 27	7:00 – 9:00 pm	legacysig@afhs.ab.ca
ONTARIO	Monday, January 26	1:30 – 3:30 pm	ontariosig@afhs.ab.ca
WRITING	Friday, January 9	9:30 – 11:30 am	writing@afhs.ab.ca

The AFHS Resource Centre is located at **Suite 251S, 8500 Macleod Trail SE** and all in-person SIG meetings are held there. Members are encouraged to stay after meetings, when possible, to browse the collection!

Our collection has over twelve thousand print items, and many are available to be borrowed for a one-month loan. Electronic resources include computers, a multi-function printer, scanners (flatbed and overhead) and a microfiche reader. Journals from around the world are available to view in either print or digital formats. As a **FamilySearch Affiliate Library**, visitors can now view additional FamilySearch digital records at the AFHS Resource Centre that they can't see at home. We also have a subscription to the Canadian newspapers on Newspaper Archive.

SIG NEWS

Our members can watch recorded sessions of past Society and SIG meetings and view handouts at the AFHS website. You must be **signed in to the website** to access them. Go to Resources, then click on Meeting Videos & Handouts.

- Most SIGs will hold Zoom-only meetings during the winter months.
- If you are thinking of possibly joining a SIG, you can attend a meeting to try it first. You just need to email Marion to receive a link communications@afhs.ab.ca
- The English/Welsh SIG meeting on January 17 will have members sharing their resolutions for the new year and any brick walls they are trying to break down.
- On January 26, Nancy Leveque will be speaking about Early Ontario Newspapers at the Ontario SIG meeting.
- If you are looking for some beginner genealogy help, check out the Basics SIG meeting on January 31. They will be discussing Wills and Probate Records at this meeting.

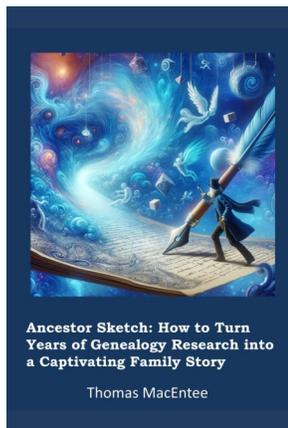
Resource Centre Highlights

Linda Murray

Happy New Year from the **AFHS Library Committee!** The Committee members are Christine Hayes, Dorothy Clements, Linda Murray, Lorna Laughton, Marion Peterson, Marg Crumb and Velma Boyer.

The AFHS Library at the Resource Centre has six new books recently added to the collection:

Title	Author	Publication Date
<i>Ancestor Sketch: How to Turn Years of Genealogy Research into a Captivating Family Story</i>	Thomas MacEntee	2025
<i>Tracing your Family History using Irish Newspapers and other Printed Materials: A Guide for Family Historians</i>	Natalie Bodle	2024
<i>World War I Genealogy Research Guide (3rd Edition): Tracing American Military and Non-Combatant Ancestors Includes a Guide to Canadian Great War Military Research</i>	Debra M. Dudek	2024
<i>Tracing Your Marginalised Ancestors: A Guide for Family Historians</i>	Janet Few	2024
<i>Beginner's Guide to Genealogy: Essential Tools, Records, and Techniques For Beginning Genealogists</i>	W. Daniel Quillen	2023
<i>Finding Family: My Search for Roots and the Secrets in My DNA</i>	Richard Hill	2017



Thomas MacEntee's book about writing an Ancestor Sketch is the newest of the six books. It has some great tips on how to take all the research you've collected over the years and create something that your family will want to read!

You can view his short presentation on the topic for free at the VGA's (Virtual Genealogical Association) YouTube page
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-kjt5Q5Mdw>

He also did a longer presentation for Legacy Family Tree Webinars which is still available for members to view
<https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/creating-an-ancestor-sketch>

COMING SOON

Two more new titles arriving in February are:

Living in the Know: The Adoptee's Quick-Start Guide to Finding Family with DNA Testing by Geraldine Berger (2021)

Tracing Your Northern Irish Ancestors by Ian Maxwell (2021)

AFHS Settlers Project

Ron Gilmore

Approaching the centennial year of 1967, the Canadian federal government launched a program to encourage communities across the country to collect historical information on their settlement. The Centennial Commission provided funding to communities to publish a book of their findings. This amounted to \$1 per resident, and individual provinces often matched this amount. Historical societies and local groups jumped on the project.

The result of this initiative was a tremendous outpouring of writing about our earliest settlers. In my grandparents' homestead area in Shellbrook, Saskatchewan, locals produced a large, hardcover volume with the names and stories of the area's first inhabitants. On a visit to the local credit union, I found a copy of this volume titled *Footprints of Our Pioneers*. I was tickled to read the words of my dear Aunt Gertie as she recounted collecting duck eggs on her way home from school. And the story of my schoolteacher grandfather, who bought a gun for homestead protection, only to wound one of his own cows while learning to shoot. These books contained the names of families, local businesses, and community leaders, along with stories and anecdotes from family members.

The Alberta Family Histories Society has collected 265 such books from communities all over Alberta. A significant portion of these books were provided by the Chinook Branch of the Alberta Historical Society. A number were from Books Between Friends, a Calgary bookstore that collects used books and allows charitable organizations to help man their store in exchange for a charitable donation. Over the years, the Library Committee purchased some at used book sales using AFHS funds, and our own members have donated copies.

In 2024, under the leadership of Anna Babaeva, AFHS launched a project to index the names of our earliest settlers as documented in these local history books. To date, we have indexed over 70 community books and captured more than 55,000 names. You can now search these names on the AFHS Alberta Ancestors website under the Settlers tab.

<https://albertaancestors.ca>

Your search results will give you the title of the book that the name was indexed from, the call number for the book held in the AFHS Resource Centre library and the page number of the entry.

Surname	Given Name	Book Title	Call No.	Page No.
Smith	William	Best in the West by a Damsite	971.23 BASS 1974	364

You can click on either the Book Title or the Call No. that are shown in green. This will take you to more information on the book including time period it covers, publication year, number of pages and communities included. It also includes a link to the Library Page. This takes you to the AFHS Resource Centre page which includes a button that takes you to our Library Catalogue. Here you can also find our hours of operation and borrowing policies. To view the actual book, drop by our Resource Centre for a visit!

<https://afhs.ab.ca/library>

For anyone outside the Calgary area, our volunteers also offer Research Assistance for a small fee and can email you scanned copies of pages from the book (within the fair dealing limits of the Canadian Copyright Act).

<https://afhs.ab.ca/research-assistance>

CALGARY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Family History Coaching

In-person at Central Library

Calgary Public Library

January 31, 2026 1:00 – 3:00 pm

<https://calgarylibrary.ca/events-and-programs/programs/family-history-coaching>

UPCOMING EVENTS

*all times listed are in MDT *events are free unless \$

Where They Once Stood: Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor's Place of Origin

Virtual

Legacy Family Tree Webinars

January 14, 2026 Noon

<https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/where-they-once-stood-finding-your-immigrant-ancestors-place-of-origin>

Heritage Park: It's History and Role in Preserving Our Heritage! by Bob Pearson

In-Person

Chinook Country Historical Society

January 17, 2026 2:00 pm

For more information on this event, email info@chinookhistory.ca

2026 Genealogy Conferences & Events by Crista Cowan

Virtual

Ancestry Virtual Events

January 21, 2026 11:00 am

<https://www.ancestry.com/c/discover/education>

Family History: Using Second World War Records

Virtual

The National Archives

January 24, 2026 3:30 am

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/family-history-using-second-world-war-records-tickets-1973331981076>

Make Easy Video Stories Your Family Will Cherish

Virtual

Legacy Family Tree Webinars

January 28, 2026 Noon

<https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/make-easy-video-stories-your-family-will-cherish>

Scottish Indexes Conference

Virtual

Scottish Indexes

January 31, 2026

<https://www.scottishindexes.com/conference.asp>

RootsTech 2026

Hybrid

FamilySearch

March 5 – 7, 2026

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/rootstech>

SAVE THE DATE

AFHS Conference

In-person \$

Alberta Family Histories Society

October 17, 2026 8:00 – 3:00 pm

<https://afhs.ab.ca/event/conference>

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About Our Society

Alberta Family Histories Society is a registered non-profit organization that welcomes anyone interested in genealogy and family history! For over 40 years, we've helped people grow their family trees and discover the stories of their roots. We have substantial resources about Calgary and southern Alberta but can help you research your roots worldwide. Our website is <https://afhs.ab.ca>.

We learn from each other in a variety of settings – Society meetings, **Special Interest Group** meetings, workshops and biannual conferences. For up-to-date meeting information, see our website calendar at <https://afhs.ab.ca/calendar>.

Visit one of our most valuable resources - the **AFHS Resource Centre**! While our collection has an emphasis on materials pertaining to Alberta and Canada, we also have subscription databases, basic genealogy books and information from around the world. AFHS is a **FamilySearch Affiliate Library**, which gives you access to FamilySearch records you can't view at home. Our volunteers look forward to showing you what we have to offer for your genealogy research! You can view a catalogue of our holdings at <https://afhs.ab.ca/library>.

Documenting local historical records is part of our mission. **Alberta Ancestors** is a special project to showcase cemetery records at <https://albertaancestors.ca>. Our site features over 370 cemeteries and more than 260,000 memorials.

Members have a wealth of opportunities to share strategies, struggles, successes and stories with others who appreciate the challenges of this hobby. One option is for members to share family tree projects and to post stories online as part of our **Family Genes** website at <https://www.familygenes.ca>.

We welcome visitors, so please drop in at a meeting and introduce yourself. Come see how our services and programs can fit your needs. We hope you will join us either in-person or virtually! To receive a guest Zoom invitation to one of the **AFHS Society Meetings**, contact Marion at communications@afhs.ab.ca.

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AFHS RESOURCE CENTRE

**Suite 251S, 8500 Macleod Trail SE
Calgary, AB T2M 0J8**

Fall/Winter Hours

Thursday, 10 am – 2 pm

Friday, 10 am – 2 pm

Saturday, Noon – 4 pm

Check our website calendar for any time changes or closures.

<https://afhs.ab.ca/calendar>



CONTACT US

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Phone: 403-214-1447

Facebook: Alberta Family Histories Society

Instagram: abfamilyhistoriessociety



Land Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, we would like to acknowledge that the land on which we gather and where we work to preserve the records and family history of those who came before us are on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising of the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani First Nations), the Tsúú'tínà, the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw and Goodstoney First Nations), the Métis Nation (Districts 5 & 6) and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.