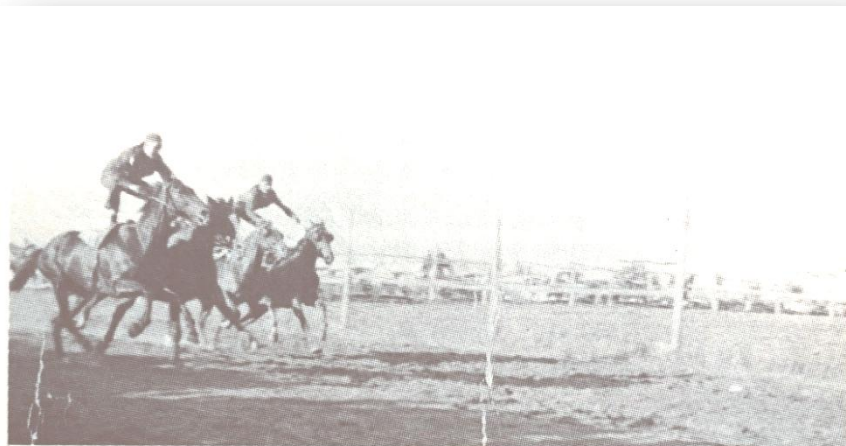


BENNY LIGHTFOOT

LOCAL LEGENDARY HORSEMAN

Benny was born in 1930 in Spirit River to George and Mary Lightfoot. He had five brothers; James, Leonard, G. Edward, Howard and Robert and one sister. The children attended school at Spirit River until the family moved to Grande Prairie in 1942. Once settled in, Benny and his siblings furthered their education at the Grande Prairie School. By the time he was 14, Benny was jockeying for Ewart Ellis who owned and operated a livery barn on the corner of 101 street and 101 avenue. When he wasn't riding horses, Benny managed Billy Salmond's cattle operation. The Silver Crest Lodge (11902 – 100 street) is currently located on Salmond land. Mr. Salmond also had a grazing lease south of Grande Prairie on the Smoky River where he pastured his cattle during the summer months. In the spring, Benny would drive the cattle down Clairmont Road (100 street) south past the familiar sites (at that time) of the Post Office, Bird's Store and Joe's Corner Coffee Shop. It wasn't unusual to see cattle wandering north through town coming home on their own for the winter.

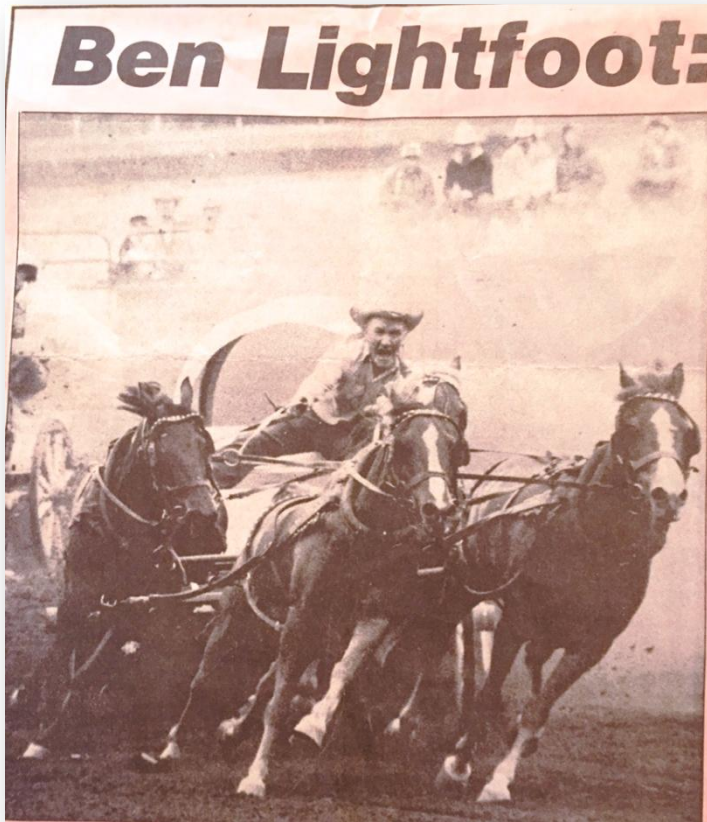
In 1949, Benny started jockeying outside of the Peace Area in the "B" Circuit of central and southern Alberta and into Montana as well. Benny was still riding Mr. Ellis' well-known thoroughbreds; Miss Havoc, Bobby Moore and Safanad.



Benny Lightfoot and Don Hawkes, Roman standing, 1955 at Teepee Creek sports.

In his early 20's, Benny lost all the fingers on his left hand in a power-saw accident; however, he never let the accident deter him from his love of racing horses. Benny was very successful and later bought Miss Havoc and Bobby Moore and raced them "**Roman Standing**". Roman standing has a simple technique – take two horses, strap their bridles together

with a two-foot strap, place a pad on each horse's back that is secured by a strap around the girth, hold the reins and place one foot on each pad and race. It was a very exciting event for the large crowds who came specifically to see Benny and anyone else who would race against him. Benny also competed in the Chariots and the Free-For-All at Grande Prairie, Teepee Creek, Fort St. John and High Prairie. When Mr. Ellis passed away in 1955, Benny purchased Gold Saffron and Prairie Gold.



Benny moved to Glen Leslie during his racing years. He worked alongside many other local young men on Art Patterson's threshing crew. In 1956, he purchased his own farm which had been previously owned by Nels Meyers (SW 21-71-3-W6). During this time-frame, Benny not only also assisted with the yearly organization of the Bezanson Stampede but competed as well.

For a decade or more, in addition to farming, Benny raised racing ponies that were a cross between Quarter Horses and Welsh Ponies. He harnessed the fastest of them for Pony Chariot and Pony Chuck-wagon events around the area. Once again, he proved to be the master of the track.

In February 1958, Grande Prairie received its charter as a City. For the historic event, the City arranged to have Henry McCullough, a northern game guide, to reenact pioneer days by making the 9-day trip on horseback. The Charter was presented to Mr. McCullough by the Premier on the steps of the Alberta Legislature following which, Henry began his long, cold journey home. Benny Lightfoot and Norman Hollingsworth led the horse escort from the 4-mile corner into Grande Prairie. Although it was a bitterly cold day, many people still lined Clairmont Road to witness the special event.

Benny was also a well-known prankster. On one occasion, he manipulated a picture of Robert McPhee into a "Wanted Dead or Alive" Poster with a reward of \$500. He then nailed it to a post on the main trail to Grande Prairie where it would be visible to everyone heading to town.



Benny Lightfoot and Norman Hollingsworth leading the horse escort as the charter was brought into the City of Grande Prairie in February, 1958.

Benny Lightfoot Biography

At various times, Benny served as a director for the Peace River Pony Racing Association. Benny's success, not only as a competitor but also as a horse-breeder, made him an important figure in the racing community across the Peace Country.

In later years, Benny lived with Charlotte Patterson on NW 31-71-3-W6 across from the Glen Leslie Church. Benny passed away in 1986 and was buried at the Glen Leslie Cemetery.



Reference

Smoky to Grande Prairie History Book

Larry Fells

Newspaper article

Written by Wanda Zenner – September 2021

Pictures – Wanda Zenner collection